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[DULCIE FELT LIKE A CREATURE IN A DREAM—SO WEIRD WAS THE SCENE !]

DEARER THAN GOLD.

CHAPTER XI.

SALOME LYLE, though a good, kind-hearted woman as ever lived, was a little, only a little, narrow-minded.

The daughter of a country clergyman, when very young she had married her father's curate on his presentation to a village rectory, and thus the whole of her life had been passed in one groove.

It would have been well-nigh impossible for her to help growing prejudice; and if she had not been sweet tempered, and of a very affectionate disposition to start with, she would probably have been far more precise and fussy than she was.

Entreated urgently to come to Ravensmere, and make it her home for a year or longer, she had not refused.

Sir Jocelyn was a trifle like his younger brother, and the resemblance to her husband made Salome eager to help him; but the quiet, precise widow saw a very great deal in

his establishment that wanted setting to rights.

She disapproved intensely of the result of Dulcie's bringing up, and not having the tact or worldly wisdom to begin her reform only when she had won her niece's affection, she attempted a few sweeping changes at once, and from that moment the heiress was her steady, if secret, foe.

Long before Miss Winter came to Ravensmere Aunt Salome had discovered she had not a shadow of influence over Dulcie.

Her brother-in-law had made her mistress of his house, and confided his daughter to her charge; but Miss Lyle, though never expressing defiance in words, deliberately went her own way, outraging her aunt's prejudices at every turn, and disobeying her whenever an opportunity presented itself.

Poor Aunt Salome was quite aware of her failure. She knew she was as incapable of managing Dulcie as a wooden image could have been; but she would not give up the attempt. She perseveringly tried to make the heiress into her own idea of what a young lady should be; never perceiving that she was driving

the girl from open revolt into something worse—namely, concealment.

Love, in Mrs. Lyle's eyes, was the one thing that could transform her rebel. She believed that matrimony sobered down most headstrong girls, therefore she ardently desired to see Dulcie married.

Seeing Sir Jocelyn's partiality for young Mr. Granville, perceiving for herself that he was a simple, unaffected gentleman, she began to think he would be a suitable husband for Dulcie, and went to work as a match-maker with great zeal.

Dick accepted her invitations as warmly as they were given. He was so desperately in love with Miss Winter that there were few places he would not have visited on the chance of meeting her.

He had a very friendly regard for Sir Jocelyn, and he never, for a moment, dreamed that anyone could suspect him—a disinherited man—of aspiring to the heiress. Never were any people more completely at cross purposes.

Sir Jocelyn and Mrs. Lyle felt certain their wish would be fulfilled. According to their views Dick was a most faithful, patient suitor.



They would have been amazed had they been told not only that he had no idea of marrying Dulcie, but that he was passionately in love with some one else!

Dick was a great favourite with Mrs. Lyle; but the night when Nell paid her reluctant visit to Dalesham House Mr. Granville had the misfortune to seriously offend Aunt Salome.

He had been invited to dinner, and had accepted. Five minutes before the hour of the repast, as they were waiting in the drawing-room, a little note was brought to Mrs. Lyle, in which Dick excused himself on the plea of sudden business.

Now, she had had quite a battle to keep Dulcie at home, and the thought of her victory being wasted quite annoyed the widow. Besides, she did not believe the excuse.

Mr. Granville had no business but that connected with the estate. If anything at Field Royal detained him he must have known it sooner, and could have let her know before the eleventh hour.

Sir Jocelyn, disappointed of his friend, went to bed early.

Mrs. Lyle and her niece were left to what they most disliked—*a tête-à-tête*; and they found it as gloomy, than instead of scolding Miss Winter for returning so late, and accepting a stranger's escort, the interruption of their arrival was so welcome that she said never a word of reproof. But—alas for the power of that little word! Mrs. Lyle had had a bad night, and ample leisure during her sleepless hours to review the companion's offences.

She decided Miss Winter had behaved very badly—though whether in getting wet through, or in accepting dry clothes when offered her she did not say—and she determined to let poor Nell know her exasperation.

Dulcie was not at breakfast, so her aunt improved the occasion, speaking not unkindly, but quite strongly enough to bring the colour to Nell's cheeks. It was no wicked and unseemly to drive a few miles with a gentleman well known to the family, reflected Nell, what would Mrs. Lyle think of that? September night when she had resigned herself to the guidance of a perfect stranger, telling him to take her where he would, and actually whiling away the last hours of the night alone with him on Felixstowe beach?

It was the recollection of her first meeting with Dick that dyed poor Nell's cheeks, not any thought of Lord Dale. She had accepted the latter's kindness as a simple act of neighbourly civility, never dreaming any other importance could be attached to it.

"There, there, child!" said Mrs. Lyle, in a milder tone, "don't look so crest-fallen. I daresay you meant no harm, only you ought to have thought. You young people are all alike. Mr. Granville never came to dinner yesterday, after fixing the day himself, and almost asking me to invite him; and Dulcie was as disagreeable as possible. I assure you it was a dreary evening. Where is my niece this morning, by-the-bye? Why doesn't she come to breakfast?"

"I have not seen her to-day."

Mrs. Lyle rang, and made inquiries. She was not well pleased at the answer. "Her niece had ridden off an hour before, attended by her groom. She had not left word where she was going."

"She will be the death of me!" said poor Mrs. Lyle, pathetically. "What could take her off at this time?"

Nell had a shrewd suspicion, but would not put it into words. She thought that Dulcie had gone over to Dalesham to see her friend, and plead with her for a reversal of the very strange and ungracious message sent only the night before.

And Nell was quite right. Dulcie had gone to Lady Dale, the strange, fantastic beauty had for her a fascination stronger than any other woman. Dulcie had not much heart. She could not be said to love Zoë, as young girls sometimes do love women older than themselves, but she was completely dominated

by her. The proud, imperious heiress bowed to the will of the little creature who hardly reached to her shoulder. Zoë had captivated Sir Jocelyn's daughter utterly, and completely.

Lady Dale had been away from Dalesham nearly all the brief space of her married life. She was clever enough to know that she would not be popular among the quiet country families, who might make awkward inquiries about her past history. Lord Dale mentioned casually, one day, a wish to call and see a friend's child, a "little girl" at school. His wife jumped at it. She might, by a very slight exertion, now bind this "little girl" to her interest in the future, and secure for herself at least one devoted partisan among those who would be prepared to criticise her. Dulcie was at an impressionable age then, and the conquest was made.

Zoë, Lady Dale, could read character like an open book. She knew that ambition, and not love, was the keynote of the child's character; that already she had learned her importance as Sir Jocelyn's heiress. Very skilfully Lady Dale contrived to insinuate to Dulcie that with her beauty and expectations she ought to be a princess. Then she hinted how the estates of Ravensmore and Dalesham joined would make a noble property, and repeated that her stepson had gone abroad full of something more than friendship for his childish neighbour.

Dulcie was fifteen, and had very pleasant recollections of the handsome boy she had known all her life. She knew that Dalesham was a grand old property, and that to become Lennox's bride, and join her heritage with him, would give her a position equal to her ambition.

Dulcie was never quite free from the fear her father might marry again, and an infant brother oust her from her place as heiress of Ravensmore. To be mistress of Dalesham would be compensation; and so the girl—she was only fifteen, remember—drank in every word that fell from Zoë's lips, and believed that Lennox was desperately in love with her, and had only gone abroad without proposing, on account of her youth.

The influence thus gained was never lost. When Mrs. Lyle came home, a "finished" young lady, her friend was living at Dalesham, almost in retirement. Of course the intimacy ripened. It had grown to such a height when Mrs. Lyle arrived at Ravensmore that Dulcie had hardly half a thought unshared with the widow.

Aunt Salome saw Lady Dale once, and detested her, but when she applied to Sir Jocelyn to forbid the acquaintance to be resumed. She might discourage the intimacy by every means in her power; but for his old friend, her dead husband's sake, he could not put such an insult on Lady Dale as absolutely to forbid his daughter her society.

So it went on. Lady Dale, quick to see her advantage, never came to Ravensmore—glad to show the Lyles that Dulcie sought her unsolicited.

The butler made no difficulty about admitting Dulcie, even at that early hour. He was used to her frequent visits, and allowed her to go upstairs to Lady Dale unannounced.

She drew back the velvet curtains and entered the room where Nell had been shown the night before. The same heavy, dull atmosphere pervaded it, exhaling the same strong perfume. Lady Dale was sitting at breakfast, if a cup of chocolate deserves the name. She rose when she saw Dulcie, and said, bitterly,—

"What have you come for?"
"Because I want to see you."
"Did not that girl give you my message?"

"Yes; but she admitted she made a mistake in what she told you, and I came to set it right."

Lady Dale shook her head.
"She looked true," said this strange woman, slowly, "and she spoke quite naturally!"
"She told you the truth as far as facts went. She said my aunt had kept me at

home to entertain a certain person; but the fact is, Zoë, I only stayed at home because I could not get away. I can't defy Aunt Salome, beyond a certain point. As to Dick Granville, he never came."

"And you were sorry?"

"I was sorry, because it left me alone with my aunt. As to any other sorrow, Zoë, you ought to know me better."

"I am told your father and aunt desire the match above all things?"

"I believe they do. But he has not got two sixpences to rub together, and—I prefer a little prosperity. Besides, Mr. Granville worries me; he is so desperately in earnest. Zoë, you need not quarrel with me about him, indeed."

Zoë looked at her somnolently.

"You are very pretty. You will make a splendid countess! Now, what will you give me for a piece of news? Lennox has returned."

"I know it."

"And you saw him?"

"Yes."

"What did you think of him?"

Dulcie answered nothing, but the two women looked into each other's eyes and undulated each other.

Truly they were different in thought as they were in face. Zoë had all the passionate fire of feeling, which was a legacy with her foreign blood. She would do anything, however desperate, to gratify her love—or hatred.

Dulcie Lyle had no such depth of feeling in her nature. She had set her mind being rich, on having a title, and being freed from the control she felt so irksome.

Lennox, Lord Dale could give her all this. He was handsome, young and cheerful. She did not doubt that as his wife she could mould him to her will, and contrive to enjoy her own way; therefore, to be Lady Dale was her ambition.

They passed for friends, these two—the mistress of Dalesham, with her weird Eastern beauty, and Dulcie Lyle, with her cold, fair features, and yet their intimacy had in it nothing of unselfishness, and but little of affection.

Dulcie owing to Lady Dale's beauty had almost a superstitious faith in her power, and because there was a nameless fascination in the mystery of her life.

Zoë kept intimate with Miss Lyle because that very mystery required her to have at least one confidante. When busy scandal was too free with her name it silenced rumour to assert that Sir Jocelyn's daughter spent all her leisure time at Ravensmore; but there was one other reason.

Before ever she married Lord Dale Zoë had been passionately in love. The young man—he was very young then—had been travelling when he met accidentally with the lovely girl. He admired her intensely. He had no chance of doing more before her father took the alarm, and removed her from danger's way. The young man was recalled to England by family affairs, and within a year Zoë married Lord Dale, or, perhaps to put it more plainly, was sold to him by her rapacious parent.

The old noble—he was sixty turned—almost worshipped his child-wife. For her sake he defrauded his son, and left her the use of Dalesham House for life, and every penny of his property that was not entailed.

Zoë's captivity had not lasted long, and her purchaser had been devoted to her, gratifying her every wish. Yet she rejoiced with hidden glee when poor Lord Dale died, and she regained her freedom.

She was very different now from the flower-girl who had attracted Dick Granville's passing admiration years ago, but she was more beautiful, not less so.

She was now in all the zenith of her loveliness; and, besides her position as a widowed peeress, she was rich. A man far wealthier than poor Dick might have married her without loss of caste. And to marry him was the sole object of Zoë's life.

She had never rested from the time of her widowhood until she discovered Mr. Granville's whereabouts, (she knew his name, and had treasured it all these years). She could not exactly dog his footsteps, but she did contrive to meet him at various places. Then Dick went abroad, and my lady settled herself at Dalesham, sure that sooner or later he would come back to Field Royal.

More than a year later he had come back, but as servant, not master. His loss of fortune made no difference to Zoë. She loved him with the passion which had survived the test of absence, time, and indifference.

Dulcie Lyle, her sole confidante, had promised she should meet Mr. Granville at Ravensmere; but Dulcie had found Aunt Salome utterly averse to the plan. This, then, was the link between the two.

Zoë was in love, and the heiresses could give her opportunities of meeting the hero of her love. While Dulcie's ambition centred on young Lord Dale, and though Zoë confessed she was not on good terms with her stepson, she declared she had the power of making him propose to her friend.

What this power was or wherein it consisted she would never say, but she asserted positively she possessed it; and Dulcie, who had never known her friend fail in anything she undertook, believed her firmly.

"And why have you come to-day?" said Zoë, suddenly. "Have you any errand besides setting me right as to that little girl's mistakes?"

"Yes!"

Lady Dale looked at her thoughtfully.

"I thought last night you were afraid!"

Something very like a shiver passed over Dulcie's frame. Despite her self-command, her calm assurance and the general independence of her character, she was, after all, only eighteen, and her youth would evidence itself sometimes.

"I am not afraid, Zoë!" she said, firmly. "I put it off two or three times, but I really want to try. I came here for that to day."

"What would your aunt think?" asked Zoë, mockingly. "She would put me in prison you know, child—if she could."

"She is never likely to hear anything about it, Zoë. I am longing to begin!"

Zoë shook her head.

"Are you quite sure?" she asked, slowly, and with something almost like compassion in the tone. "You know, Dulcie, the step son taken you cannot draw back, and it may try your nerves."

"It has not tried yours."

"Because it is no new thing to me. I have practised it from my childhood. Besides, Dulcie, you are wrong. It has tried me. I am not two-and-twenty yet, but look at me and on that child you sent here last night! Can't you see the difference?"

Dulcie marvelled. Was it possible there was not a year between Lady Dale and Miss Winter! Yes, she could see the difference, even for herself.

Zoë's figure was as youthful, as girlish even as Miss Winter's; but her face, though unlined by a single wrinkle, had a terribly worn look. Her large black eyes, despite their lustre, had this same wearied appearance, as though they had been gazing long into space for something they could not find. They were marvellous eyes, flashing back every feeling of their owner's heart; but the storms through which she had passed, the conflicts she had endured, the intense restlessness, the never satisfied craving for a love denied her—all these had written their presence surely on Zoë's features, while Nell's face, despite the trouble of her girlhood and the secret care which still harassed her, had yet the sweet unsullied purity of a child's.

"Miss Winter is a baby!" said Dulcie, rather crossly. "Don't pick her out for my imitation. I have quite made up my mind, Zoë, and should like it to be soon. Aunt Salome is quite capable of sending after me if

she guesses where I am, or arriving herself in the family coach."

"She would be welcome," said Lady Dale, gravely, "I assure you, Dulcie, I am very anxious to meet your aunt. I regret now I did not attempt to propitiate her. It was a false move!"

She rang the bell, and the breakfast things were removed.

Dulcie Lyle leant back in her chair, and did not seem to hear the colloquy which took place between Zoë and the page Nell Winter had sent the night before. But she was conscious presently that the curtains were drawn closely before the window, and every ray of daylight shut out.

Then the page brought in a silver lamp and a huge bowl filled with some black inklike liquid.

He and Lady Dale then disappeared, and were gone so long that Miss Lyle found her solitude irksome.

She was not timid by nature, but she felt her courage begin to come out at her finger tips. It seemed almost an eternity before they returned—the page in a crimson velvet suit, bare legs, and a handkerchief-knotted, turban fashion, on his head.

Zoë was in pure white, her dusky hair unbound fell below her waist. She sat down on a low chair in front of a small table, on which the bowl of dark-looking liquid had been placed.

The boy knelt at her feet, his clasped hands resting on the table, and his eyes—how like they were to Zoë's—fixed on the dusky pool.

Dulcie felt like a creature in a dream, so weird was the scene. She could not move nor speak. Some fascination had completely robbed her of all will-power. She sat in her chair motionless as a statue, while a few notes of rich, thrilling melody floated on the air. She felt rather than heard that the song was a duet, the words in some language she had never heard before.

When it was ended she noticed that the boy's eyes were closed, as though in deep slumber, and Lady Dale was looking at her with an expression half of inquiry and half of pity.

Dulcie, for one moment, wished herself at Ravensmere. The next she had regained her composure. It was too late to go back, the rubicon was past!

CHAPTER XL

Mrs. LYLE need not have felt offended with Dick Granville for refusing her invitation at the eleventh hour. His will had been quite good to come to Ravensmere; indeed, the old house held a charm for him he could rarely withstand. But on this occasion he could not help himself, unless he had been deaf to all claim of kindred; for just as he was going upstairs a telegram was put into his hands, which was sent by his eldest sister, and read as follows:—

"Come to us at once, for mother's sake."

There was no reason given for the strange summons. The message was so abrupt that poor Dick could not even determine whether his mother was dying, and he sent for to say good-bye, or whether some trouble had befallen her in which his assistance was required. He rather thought the former. He could imagine Mrs. Granville ill, or meeting with some bodily accident; but he really could not associate any other kind of trouble with The Laurels. His mother was a woman of very few attachments. He did not recollect a single friend whose death would move her. If the sorrow were connected with his brother, Bob's wife, a gentle, kindly creature, with whom Dick was on the best of terms, would certainly have sent for him. His mother's money, at least the chief of it, was tied up in a Government annuity. The portion which did not die with her was invested in preference railway shares. It therefore seemed morally

impossible that money could have anything to do with this peremptory telegram.

Dick never hesitated. Cold as had been his parting with his family, he could not forsake them in their hour of need. He had looked forward to an evening spent in Nell's society. Instead, he had a tedious railway journey, and probably a very dreary welcome at the end; but Dick Granville could not have deserted his womenkind in their hour of need. He despatched an excuse to Mrs. Lyle, put his cheque-book in his pocket, and caught the seven o'clock train for London, leaving the little rural station at the very moment when he had hoped to enter the drawing room at Ravensmere.

It reminded him just a little of the last hurried journey he had taken, when he arrived at Hastings too late to see his aunt alive. He hoped a similar ending would not come to this expedition; and felt, in his impatience, as though he could have shaken Marion for being so vague in her information.

At the very earliest he could not be at Dring before ten; and so, before starting, he had the forethought to telegraph to The Laurels that he should be with them to-night, for, knowing their early hours, he thought if it was a false alarm, and nothing much really wrong, they might have gone to bed. The conviction, indeed, was growing on him that he had been summoned for some very trivial cause, and that there was no real need of alarm.

For once Dick wronged his sisters. Their trouble was very genuine, and they had been in such despair when the message was sent off that their one thought was to make it sufficiently urgent, lest, after the cavalier way in which they had treated him, their brother should refuse to come to their aid.

We left the ladies at The Laurels happy in the acquisition of two boarders, and just a little hopeful that the venerable, white-haired Mr. Reynolds, or the gay, dashing American officer might be in search of a wife, and choose one of the three sisters to fill that desirable post.

Anyway, the ladies were relieved of pecuniary cares. The bills that had sprung up waiting for Dick's accession to fortune, were not so very formidable. The five pounds a week paid by the two boarders would very soon wipe them off. Mr. Reynolds had said he should be at The Laurels at least two months, which meant at least forty pounds.

The rent was paid with the most scrupulous punctuality. Each Saturday morning a little packet containing five sovereigns was conveyed to Mrs. Granville by the maid, with "the gentlemen's compliments." It was such a delicate way of doing things that the ladies were deeply gratified. For the rest, no two visitors ever made themselves more agreeable than Mr. Reynolds and his friend. They gave no trouble, and were contented with the simplest fare. They showed a real talent for gardening, and were always ready to escort the ladies anywhere.

Mr. Hastings always took them to church. His old friend excused himself from attending public worship, by saying the heat of the building always gave him a headache; but he was thankful to turn his inability to the good of others, and kindly took charge of the house every Sunday evening, that the servants might be free for a few hours. He would sit in the garden, with a book, the picture of venerable old age; and never failed, on the return of the party from church, to ask the text and subject of the sermon.

So prosperity shone on The Laurels. The Miss Granvilles indulged in new gowns and—shall it be confessed—in new hopes.

Mr. Reynolds gently hinted to their mother his intention of bequeathing all his property to young Hastings, and his fervent hope that his friend would marry an English girl. The looks and smiles which accompanied these confidences made the widow quite sure his wishes pointed to one of her own daughters, and she grew to regard the insertion of that

wonderful advertisement in the *Times* as quite providential.

She and her girls had no concealments from their two new friends. The gentlemen heard the whole story of Dick's adoption by Mrs. Charteris, and the cruel way in which he had lost his fortune.

"Miss Petronella Smith" came in for a good deal of ladylike abuse during the recital, which always ended with the charitable wish that the "mixx" would die and leave Dick to enjoy his own again.

Mr. Reynolds listened with the utmost attention. He seemed to find a perfect fascination in the subject; but he took a completely different view from the young ladies. He assured them it would be far better to find Miss Smith and promote a marriage between her and their much-wronged brother.

Thus pressed, they owned that the companion had disappeared, that rewards had been offered for news of her in vain, and every possible search made for her without the least result.

The old gentleman shook his head ominously. He thought such a course very rash. It was enough to encourage anyone to bring forward a pretender—some girl answering to Miss Smith's description—but there, no doubt Mr. Granville remembered her sufficiently to be able to detect such a fraud.

Laura confessed her brother had never even seen Petronella; but Mr. Cameron, their family lawyer, had met her often, and was not likely to be mistaken in her identity. A look of dejection passed over the old man's face at these words, and he declared his neuralgia was so bad he must go to bed at once, and he did so, his friend going up to sit with him later, in quite filial anxiety. Perhaps if the Miss Granvilles could have heard their conversation their eyes would have been opened.

"I say!" demanded Mr. Hastings, in very different tones from those used downstairs, "how much longer is this to go on? I am sick to death of this milk-and-water existence. They have had thirty pounds of our money in hard cash, and we have gained nothing?"

"We shall gain a great deal," said the old man, calmly; "and as for our stay here, I intend to end it on Tuesday."

"Two days hence! On what excuse?"

"Oh, none! I have made my plan, and I think it will be successful, and we shall net a considerable sum. All I ask of you is to go to London, on some excuse, to-morrow, promising that you shall not return till Thursday."

"I don't like working in the dark!" said Hastings, morosely. "What am I to do on Tuesday when I get to town?"

"Anything you like, so that you keep clear of the Bank of England and Euston Railway station until you see me again. I will meet you on Tuesday afternoon at our usual house of call."

Hastings looked at him sharply.

"And not as old Mr. Reynolds, I suppose?"

"Precisely—and if you could contrive to make some alteration in your own appearance for a few days I should advise it."

"I'm blessed if I know what you are aiming at!"

"You had better not know just at present. I don't mind telling you one thing—I intend to go to the Bank of England on Tuesday to draw out my dividends. My property, as perhaps you are not aware, is invested in India Debenture Bonds."

"You are right, I had no idea of it! I begin to understand your little game, but—is it safe?"

"Don't be a coward—there's twenty thousand a-year at stake and a fine estate. Mrs. Charteris left it all to Petronella Smith for her life."

"And the girl, like the idiot she always was, took it into her head to die and deprive us of helping her to spend her fortune!"

"I don't believe she is dead."

"Well, I do. It would take a clever hand to avoid the traps we have set for her, and dodge the old lawyer's spies as well! Besides, why

should she hide herself from him? It would be to her interest to go to him?"

"Only Nell was a simpleton, and never understood her own interests. Never mind, if Tuesday's scheme succeeds I shall have plenty of ready-money, and in a very little while Mr. Cameron will know the whereabouts of the missing heiress."

"Of Nell?"

"Of Petronella Smith," said the old man, with a nod. "As her father, I shall claim the property on her behalf."

"You heard what they said downstairs? That old Cameron knew her well?"

"And that Dick Granville had never seen her. We shall have to divide our forces, my friend. Mr. Granville, (whom, for certain reasons, we had better fight shy of), shall see the heiress. You and I will interview the lawyer."

Hastings stared at his confederate in a burst of genuine admiration.

"If you had had a little honesty with your brains what a splended thing you might have made of your life!"

Reynolds smiled sardonically.

"In which case, young man, I should hardly have needed your help. As it is, our interests are bound up together, and we must either sink or swim in company."

"I'd prefer to swim."

"So would I. And but for that provoking chit we might have done so easily."

Hastings looked up with an inquiring glance from his dark eyes.

"Well?" returned the other.

"I have known you a good many years now," said the younger man, frankly, "and I understand you pretty well in most things; but there's one trait in your character I can't make out. Why do you hate that girl?"

"I never said I hated her."

"But you can't deny it. She has beauty, grace and youth—the three things most likely to touch a man's heart, bad though he may be. She is your own child, and you detest her."

"I do."

"And why?"

"I have no intention of telling you. She was always a bone of contention between me and my wife, and—she despises me!"

"She despises me!" said the younger man, thoughtfully; "and, therefore, I long to have her in my power, to make her feel my authority. If she is above ground I will find her yet, and teach her who is her master. But—I don't think, even now, I hate her as you do."

The ladies were thrown into dismay the next morning. Mr. Hastings received a letter, commanding him to go to London at once and see the general of his regiment, who chanced to be there, and had something important to communicate.

The young man could not possibly return before Thursday, though he assured them the hours would seem of double length to him until he rejoined his friends.

He was very much missed at The Laurels. A veil of sadness hung over the little party, and the girls were quite glad to remember their mother was going to London on the next day to get her dividends—a most pleasing and engrossing diversion.

Usually one of the sisters attended her, but as that dear old man, Mr. Reynolds, was going on the self same errand he escorted her.

He had tickets from a friend for a flower-show at Dring which the girls had wished to attend, (only the price of admission had forbidden it). Why should not the young ladies, he urged, avail themselves of his tickets, and attend the show under the chaperonage of their friend, the Vicar's wife? He would take every care of their mother, and bring her safely home not later than six o'clock.

Now a Royal Princess was to distribute the prizes at the flower show. The tickets were half-a-guinea each, and all the rank and fashion of the neighbourhood would be there. Think of the temptation to the Granvilles!

Besides, the Vicar's lady, who was fond of patronising them, had confessed she could not afford a ticket. Think of the triumph of being able to offer her one.

Despite their years and their prudence we must own Dick's sisters were but human. They accepted the square of pink cardboard, saw their mother and Mr. Reynolds off by a morning train, and at three o'clock started for the flower-show in the best of spirits.

The rest of the narrative depended solely on Mrs. Granville, and as she was little used to relate her adventures, her story was flurried and incoherent. Perhaps she forgot a few trifling details, but the main facts were probably right.

They had a delightful journey, she told her girls, and drove in a cab from Euston to the Bank of England. She received the dividends as usual in bank notes—hundred and sixty pounds—almost the whole of their half-year's income, and she placed the notes (also as usual), in a small leather bag, which possessed a patent lock, and was always carried by her on these occasions.

Pockets were not to be depended on. She would have been in an agony had she trusted to one, but with the locked bag clutched in one hand, and thus continually in her sight, she knew no fears.

Mr. Reynolds suggested lunch. Not the Bath bun and glass of sherry she would have taken under the circumstances, but a really elegant collation at a famous confectioner's.

They had all the delicacies of the season, and he pressed her in honour of their friendship to take a little champagne.

Perhaps, being unused to it, it got into her head, after drinking it she became very drowsy; she could hardly keep her eyes open.

Mr. Reynolds noticed her sleepiness, and begged her to rest a few moments while he went downstairs to pay the bill. She really thought she must have dropped off as soon as he left her.

When she woke up the large room was perfectly empty, and one of the young attendants told her, impertinently, they did not like people to go to sleep on their premises, and that that she must really go about her business.

Horrified at the rudeness, to which she was but little accustomed, Mrs. Granville asked what had become of her friend, the gentleman with white hair. She was told he had paid the bill, and left immediately. He had been gone over two hours.

Still half dazed by the suddenness of the alarm, Mrs. Granville felt for her bag, and discovered it had disappeared. Her purse, her return ticket, everything she had was in it; and she actually was alone and penniless in London.

With a happy thought, worthy of a wiser woman, Mrs. Granville asked to see the proprietor of the shop, and, after some demur, she was shown into the presence of the manager, who, to her amazement, looked as much a lady as herself.

Fortunately, this personage, besides being a successful woman of business, had a considerable knowledge of character, and a very kind heart.

The moment she heard Mrs. Granville's story she felt certain the poor lady had been the dupe of some professional thief.

The narrative was too simple, too tearful, and above all, too improbable to be false. No one would ever have "made up" such a seemingly incredible story. Besides, the confectioner's manager happened to know Dring, and to have passed a house called The Laurels.

Mrs. Granville's exact description of her home and its situation—her mention of the Vicar, whom Miss Stubbs knew by name—all convinced the astute spinster she had before her the victim of as cruel a theft as was often perpetrated.

The rush of business being over this good Samaritan made Mrs. Granville drink a cup of strong tea in her own parlour, and then

deputed one of the assistants, (not she who had aroused poor Mrs. Granville so rudely), to go with the poor lady to Euston station and see her safely into the train for Dring. Miss Stubbs advancing a few shillings out of her own pocket to defray the railway fare.

She would willingly have sent for a policeman and entrusted the case to him on the spot, but she feared her principal's anger if she brought needless notoriety on the shop as the scene of a robbery, and she also felt that till Mrs. Granville gave up her faith in "Mr. Reynolds" little could be done for her.

The daughters' consternation and dismay when they returned from the flower-show, and heard their mother's tale, may be imagined.

Mrs. Granville protested she must have been robbed after Mr. Reynolds left her!

Laura and Marion quite agreed with her; but a strange fancy stole upon Georgina. She had heard the maids comment, (and reproved them pretty sharply for it, too), on Mr. Hastings taking both the portmanteaus with him the day before, averring that "the old gentleman" had nothing left to keep his clothes in.

Upstairs rushed Georgina to the room occupied by Mr. Reynolds. Every drawer was empty, every peg bare. There was absolutely nothing left of the old man's property except his night-shirt, brush and comb, slippers, and the well-worn Bible, which always lay conspicuously on the dressing-table.

A terrible conviction came to the poor woman that they had been duped. Hastings' sudden journey yesterday, the presentation of the flower-show tickets, the offer to escort her mother to London, one and all were part of a deep-laid scheme, and not one penny of the dividends would they ever see.

Mrs. Granville and her elder daughters called Georgina unfeeling and suspicious. They kept their faith in the two boarders, and sat up till the last train was in, hoping for Mr. Reynolds' return.

The next day Georgina, without saying a word of her intentions, went to London and straight to the bank.

She found out the very gentleman who had handed her mother the parcel of bank-notes, and to her joy discovered he knew their numbers, but this relief was short-lived.

She was detained by the kind-hearted official while he made inquiries, and heard in a few moments that every one of the notes had been cashed the previous afternoon by an old gentleman of venerable aspect.

Georgina got home with her tidings, when her mother and Laura went into hysterics; and Marion, after a brief consultation with her youngest sister, despatched the telegram which interfered with Dick's dining at Ravensmore!

(To be continued.)

AT THE JAPANESE PLAY.—After dying in a most "realistic" manner, the Japanese actor coolly gets up and in sight of the audience strolls away. "Since none suppose that I am really slain," he argues, "and since I am no longer wanted, why should I waste my time?" So off he goes. Another quaint proceeding is that the leading performer is always attended by a servant with a long red stick like a fishing-rod, which has a candle stuck at the end of it. He cronches on the stage, and holds this up to illuminate the features of the actor or actress, and, should the latter stride suddenly across the stage, the attendant rises and follows. He is of course understood to be invisible. In a scene of great movement it is inexpressibly comic to mark four or five excited personages strutting in wrath, each followed by a fishing-rod and candle. Nor is this all. The actor's dresser likewise appears with him—invisible of course; and it is his function to rearrange, if it falls into awkward folds, the voluminous attire of the hero. The dresser also gives his master an occasional dab of paint or powder, and picks up the things he drops.

EDEN'S SACRIFICE.

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CHAPTER XXXII.—(continued).

WILFRED drew himself up with a curiously set, resolute expression about the mouth.

"I have decided," he said, steadily. "I think a trip to Italy would do you a world of good. Eden. Will you go, my darling?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"When you will!"

"As—as my wife, or—my sister?"

"As—your wife, Wilfred, if you wish it so."

His heart trembled until articulation was destroyed. His quivering lips rested upon her dark hair, and she felt the arm that encircled her twitch convulsively.

She was inexpressibly sorry for him.

"Poor Wilfred!" she murmured, soothingly, "I think your faults must have been thrust upon you, for you are innately noble."

A long silence followed.

Eden was resting unresistingly against his breast, half asleep through fatigue, now that the excitement of the moment was over; and Gordon, almost mad through passionate love, was endeavouring to put the memory of it from him that he might think and plan for the future.

There was no consideration of restoring her to her friends now. All that had passed with the danger of losing her. He would sell his heart's blood, drop by drop, to keep her; he would sell his very soul, even as Faust did to Mephistopheles.

His conscience pricked him concerning the illegality of their marriage, but he put it from him deliberately.

"What is marriage but a union of hearts?" he asked himself, feverishly, with his lips upon her short, curly hair. "She shall be nothing to me—not nothing until her whole heart and soul are mine. I will win! Eden mine—mine! What can Heaven offer to compare with that? My wife!"

He had drawn her closer than he was aware. She smiled into his face a trifle breathlessly.

"Forgive me!" he whispered. "You see even my love is cruel."

"The paradoxical cruelty of tenderness," she answered, gently, "that kills through cherishing. If I give myself to you, Wilfred, how long before you will weary of me?"

"Could I ever weary of air, of the stars, of perfection, of an ideal? Oh Eden, love me—only love me—not lightly, but with the full capability of your nature! Let it expand and engulf me, and I swear to you that, in spite even of the past and memory, I will make you happy! Tell me that you will try, dearest darling!"

"I will try. How good you are to me, after all—all after all!"

The conversation was interrupted by the stopping of the carriage before a dark, silent house.

Jim Lewis descended from the box and opened the door.

"How can I go in there?" Eden inquired, anxiously. "I have on only my wrapper and slippers."

"No questions will be asked," answered Gordon. "This man's wife lives here. We will remain only until to-morrow."

She allowed him to lift her from the carriage and assist her up the stoop, while Jim Lewis opened the door with a latch-key.

He left them in a rather musty parlour, while he went to find his wife; then returned and conducted them to an uncomfortably-furnished room on the second floor.

"It's the only one vacant to-night," Mrs. Lewis explained, "but I hope it will answer."

"Quite well," replied Eden, pleasantly.

Once again she and Gordon were left alone.

He looked at her uneasily.

"Would you prefer that I should remain in the parlour for the remainder of the night?" he stammered.

"No" she answered. "I am an aw'ful coward, and should be afraid in here alone."

He set his teeth hard and drew a high-backed, hair-cloth sofa to an extreme end of the room, placing a half-worn paper screen between it and the bed.

"See what a nice room I have improvised!" he said, endeavouring to speak lightly. "I am sorry to subject you to such discomfort for even one night. Go to bed, dear, and forget all your trials in a sweet, dreamless sleep. There will be no goblins to get you to-night. Good-night, Eden!"

"Good-night!"

He lifted her hand to his lips. She looked at him a moment curiously, then turned away, and, with her wrapper still on, laid down upon the bed and slept.

Gordon resolutely kept his eyes shut, but there was no sleep for him. Nature was in revolt.

He thought of everything—made plans and rejected them, seeing some trifling flaw by which detection might follow; but when morning came he was prepared for every emergency.

The future was as clearly outlined as a portrait by a master-hand. He was radiant with happiness. Success, love, joy, were within his grasp. He had but to open his arms to embrace them.

He bathed his face with cold water, carefully rearranged his hair before the cracked mirror, then stood looking down upon Eden as she still slept, the fire in his cheeks and eyes making him strangely handsome.

His arms were folded tightly across his breast, as though to resist the temptation of taking her in them.

"Eden!" he said, gently.

The dainty lids raised.

"The breakfast bell has rung. Will you come down? or would you prefer to have yours here?"

She looked about the little, uncomfortable, stuffy room with a repressed shiver.

"I will go down, I think," she answered.

"You feel strong enough to go with my assistance?"

"I am very well indeed!" she answered. "I think the excitement of last night was a magnificent tonic. Shall I be likely to see any one except Mr. Lewis and his wife?"

"I think not. They let rooms, but take no boarders. Catherine will think to send your clothes to-day, and this evening, if you are well enough, I will engage passage on the *Etruria*, which sails at daybreak."

"You are going—"

"To Italy, to begin a new life, with Heaven's help."

There was such deep feeling in the words that the tears arose to Eden's eyes. All her soul seemed merged into sympathy for the man who was so cruelly wronging her. Every look of his eyes, every tone of his voice, seemed to deepen it: and while her heart was still bleeding over Bertie Staunton she longed to put her arms about Gordon's neck and comfort him.

She laid her hand upon his folded arms and lifted her sweet eyes, filled with tears.

"Yes," she said, gently, "we will begin from to-morrow at daybreak, forgetting all the past, and living each for the other and Heaven."

He bent his head and touched her brow reverently with his lips.

She turned away, and he looked idly from the window as she completed her simple toilet.

"I am ready" she exclaimed, standing beside him and resting her hand against his shoulder.

He took her in his arms and laid her head against his breast.

"Were thin the end, death at the beginning. I should thank Heaven for having felt your trust, my pure one!" he murmured, wistfully. "Oh Eden, if only my life were clean!"

"Hush! We are to forget, you know! Let us go!"

He kissed her once tenderly, with holy calm,

then, drawing her hand through his arm led her down.

In the hall below Jim Lewis waited.

"May I see you for a few moments, Mr. Gordon?" he asked. "Your wife can wait for you in the dining-room. She will see no one but my wife."

"Will you excuse me?" Gordon asked of Eden.

"Certainly."

Jim Lewis opened the door without glancing in, and allowed Eden to pass, closing the door upon her.

A woman was there before her.

She turned at Eden's entrance and uttered a low cry, falling back for a moment, then springing forward like a fiend and grasping the frightened girl by the wrist. It was Alice!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"At last!"

The exclamation fell from Alice's lips with a thrilling cruelty that was horrifying. But after one moment of mute dismay Eden was herself again.

She drew herself up coldly and shook the woman's hand from her arm.

"How dare you touch me!" she cried, haughtily.

The woman laughed.

It was such a hideous, scornful laugh that Eden shivered.

"Touch you!" Alice exclaimed. "Touch you, indeed! Ha, ha! That is good, really very good. What better are you than I? Touch you! You are quite right I should not, for I shall have to make you co-respondent in my suit for divorce against my husband."

Eden's face flushed hotly.

Sue thought that the brutal allusion referred to her marriage with Herbert Staunton.

"You will be good enough," she said, with quiet dignity, "to keep Staunton's name out of your conversation."

"Staunton? Poul! I was not speaking of him. He was only another fool with whom I passed a pleasant hour, captured his pocket-book, and departed."

Eden started violently.

Her heart throbbed for a moment maddeningly, then seemed to stand still with sickening dread.

"Do you mean," she cried, so hoarsely that her voice was almost unrecognisable—"do you mean that Herbert Staunton was never your husband?"

"Bah! No more than that milk-sop brother of yours."

Eden staggered backward, supporting herself against the wall.

Her face was ghastly, her eyes wildly bright. Every particle of strength seemed to have deserted her, yet gradually a stony calm came over her, the quiet of hideous dread, of palpitating longing.

"Will you swear that to me?" she asked, the words coming through her set, numb lips curiously.

"Swear it? Of course I will, though I don't know that my oath is any better than my word. He was never even for a shadowy moment my husband, for I had one living at the time of our sham marriage."

"Then—"

"My dear, don't look so horrified. You are not the only woman in the world who has been deceived. Will you answer a question?"

"Ask it."

"Did you write a letter to Walter Marchmont, giving him my history as nearly as you knew it?"

"I did."

"Did you do it with Wilfred Gordon's approbation?"

"I did."

A green haze seemed to cover the woman's face from brow to throat. Her eyes glittered like those of a cat in the dark.

"Then my revenge is to be, upon you

both!" she hissed. "Let me take it upon him first. You have believed yourself his wife, have you not?"

"I have."

"Ha, ha! I thought so. Well, he knew that you were Herbert Staunton's legal wife; that he loved you. Wilfred Gordon knew that, I tell you, and more. He knew that even had you been free he could not have married you, for he is my husband!"

There was a moment of intense silence, then a slight colour surged to Eden's pale face.

"I will not believe you!" she cried, vehemently. "He did not know of the legality of my marriage, and he is not your husband. In spite of Wilford's association with you and the life he has led, he is a noble man, who would scorn the wild act you impute to him."

"Have you really fallen in love with my handsome but scoundrelly husband? If I believed that, I think I should be willing to forego my revenge for the amusement it would give me to tell Herbert, Way, my dear, it would break his heart," scoffingly, "for badly as you have treated him he worships you."

"How do you know?"

"I see him every day. He and your brother are scouring the country for you. He has offered the most enormous rewards for you, or for any information concerning you."

A brilliant light burned in Eden's eyes, a vivid crimson had sprung to lips and cheeks. She was supernatural in her wild, thrilling beauty.

It aroused in Alice the hatred of a demon. She saw how frail was her chance against her rival, and an expression of infernal determination darkened and distorted her features.

She went nearer to Eden, her hand thrust into the pocket of her dress. The door opened noiselessly, but neither she nor Eden heard it. Gordon was upon the threshold. He recognised Alice, and paused to listen, trembling with gruesome excitement.

Regardless of Eden's loathing, Alice laid her hand upon her shoulder with a painful pressure.

"You love him!" she cried, with fiendish hatred—"you love him! Well, so do I! Do you know what it means for a woman like me to love? It means death, or worse, to the object that stands in her way. It is your infernal beauty that he loves. Do you think that I will give you to him? Do you think I will ever allow you to stand in the place I covet? Never! I have had my revenge upon Gordon by telling you the truth concerning him. I know that you will have nothing more to do with him, now that I have told you how he has deceived you. Now I will have my revenge upon you. Go back to Herbert Staunton, and see how he will stand the test with your cursed beauty spoiled! Go back and tell him that I did it, because I will not see you in the place that rightfully belongs to me, because I love him more than you ever can. Ha! ha! I shall watch him turn from you in disgust and loathing, then my revenge will be complete."

She stepped backward and drew her hand from her pocket, holding in a firm grasp a small, dark object.

Gordon had listened with a slow, paralysing terror creeping over him. The menace of her words had prepared him for some horrible thing, but nothing so bad as that she contemplated.

A grasping cry fell from his lips as he saw what her hand contained, and understood her terrible design.

Before he could reach her she had drawn the stopper from a bottle, and with a quick motion would have thrown the contents full in Eden's face, but that Gordon caught her arm, and the frightful liquid fire was thrown backward, her own face receiving what she had intended for another.

A shriek of indescribable pain rent the air as the terrible vitriol began doing its work. A

sound like the terrible frying of human flesh filled the room, and scream after scream of hoarse agony rang through the house.

Quick as thought Gordon sprang to the table and seized a bottle of oil, pouring it over the frightful burns; but it was too late to prevent the vitriol from doing its hideous work.

The house was quickly filled with people, attracted by the dreadful screams. Doctors and nurses were summoned, but the blue eyes were sightless for ever, the beautiful face that had wrought such mischief among men was a sickening blot.

When he could leave Alice in more skillful hands, Gordon approached Eden.

Her face was white, and drawn with horror.

"Let me take you to your room, my darling," he whispered, gently.

She drew back, with an expression of such loathsome terror as he had never seen upon any face.

"Don't touch me!" she cried, with repulsive energy. "I know you now for what you are. Go, before I tell all I know, and hand you over to the police, as you deserve. I pray Heaven I may never see your detested, abhorred face again!"

He looked at her once earnestly, yearningly, then turned and went.

How was he to know that she believed him to have done that hideous thing through revenge? How was he to know that she considered him worse than a murderer?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"A GENTLEMAN to see you, ma'am."

Catherine entered Mrs. Brown's room, and found her, as she was all the time now, gazing with despairing calm from the window. The sentence was repeated the second time before it was heard; then it was with the weariness of death that Doris turned to her.

"A gentleman!" she repeated, vaguely. "Who?"

"He would give no name, but begs that you will not refuse him a few moments' conversation."

"I will go down."

"Pardon me, ma'am, but your hair is not in order. If you would have no objection to my arranging it, I could do it in a moment."

The kindness of the tone, the evident desire of the woman to do something for her, touched Doris's desolate heart, and mately she submitted herself to Catherine's deft fingers.

She did not even resist when her wrapper was loosened, and a dainty silk dress substituted in its stead.

She thanked the woman with a look, and went downstairs, unconscious of how beautiful she was under all her grief.

It requires a touch of sorrow to mature the beauty of a woman's face, as it requires dew to mature the beauty of a flower.

Slowly she descended the stairs and mechanically entered the drawing-room, where her guest waited.

He came out of the shadow to meet her, but it was not until he had taken her hand and pressed it gently that she recognised him.

She staggered, and would have fallen, but that he caught her and placed her in a chair.

"Doris," he said, softly, "have you no word of welcome for me?"

She lifted her great, haggard eyes to his face wistfully. It had grown older and was lined with sorrow, but it was the face she had loved—loved still, even better than she knew. And her eyes expressed it all in a wild longing that was pitiful, while her lips remained dumb.

"My poor girl!" Walter Marchmont whimpers seating himself beside her, "how you have suffered!"

"You—know?" she gasped.

"All—yes. Mr. Staunton called upon me this morning. You would not send for me in your sorrow, but you see I have come."

"Not send for you!" she cried, wildly, staggering to her feet and beating her hands together. "What right had I? Where was my trust in you when you were accused? What sympathy did I offer you in your grief? Did I try to save you? No—oh, no! I turned my back upon you, and wrote you a letter, the very remembrance of which drew up the blood of my heart. And then I married him."

"You loved him!"

"I loathed him!"

"Doris!"

"Do you think my anguish now is because of him? No—a thousand times, no! I am glad he is to suffer the penalty of his sins!"

"Do not say that! I have some comfort for you, dear. He did not wrong you as he pretended. You are his legal wife."

"Comfort! Do you call it so? I abhor him now more than ever."

"You are bitter."

"Could I be otherwise? Look at me! What am I? The wife of a thief! What hope does life hold for me? But one end that the hope that somewhere in this great world I may discover some place where I can hide myself."

"Can you not see how unnecessarily hard you are? There are those of us—old friends, tried and true—who are waiting with outstretched arms to receive and comfort you."

Her head reeled as she looked into his kind eyes.

"No, no!" she muttered, dully. "I could never stand the shame of it all. To be painted as *his* wife would kill me. Oh, Walter, how can you stand and look at me with such gentleness, knowing what humiliation I have caused you? But if you desire revenge, it is full, complete. Look! I am a wreck. Joy, peace, love, hope are stranded, leaving nothing—nothing!"

"You never loved him, then?"

"Never!"

"You are sure?"

"How can you see me and ask? Why need I care to tell you? It will but make your revenge the greater. I am sure because, now that I have lost you for ever—for ever—I know that there is not, and never has been, room in my heart for another. Now you know. You cannot despise me more than you have done."

"Despise you!"

There was a world of tender sympathy in the tone. He took her hand and gently forced her into a chair, taking a seat beside her.

"Doris," he said, softly, "I have a story to tell you. After I have told it, I am going to ask you a question, and upon your answer to it much of my future depends. I think the passion has been all killed in my nature; but if you can overlook it there may be happiness for us yet."

She listened in a dazed sort of way, drinking in the tones of his voice with trembling eagerness, her eyes wandering over his face and resting upon each feature with insatiable love.

Gently and quietly he told her the story of Eden's life, and of her connection with his own. He told her of his love—of how he had suffered when he lost her.

He neither exaggerated nor under-estimated anything, but told her as fairly as he knew exactly the state of his feelings.

"I have tried to make you understand," he concluded, "that I loved her passionately, devotedly, as I, perhaps, shall never love again. But love is not immortal. Absence and time will conquer it! Doris, is your love for me strong enough to make you trust me in face of that? Will you believe me, and give yourself to me, when you are free, as you soon shall be? Will you try to forget that anyone ever came between us, and bear with me patiently until I can do the same?"

"Walter!"

She had endeavoured to rise again, but he held her gently.

"I know it is a cruelly cold way of asking a woman like you to be my wife, but will you not trust me, dear?"

"Your wife!"

"It will all come right by-and-by, dear. Do you think I would say so if I did not know?"

"Oh, Walter," she panted, "you cannot know what you are saying! You are asking me, the wife of a thief, to marry you—you whom I have—"

"Never mind that. You love me, do you not?"

"Love you!"

The tone was enough. No further words were needed. The excess of wildest idolatry was encompassed in it.

"I thought so," he said, reverently. "If you love me, dear, can you not trust me?"

"With my soul!"

"Then you will be my wife. There! perhaps I should not have asked you until you are free, but the circumstances are such that I think not even Heaven would blame me. You were never his except by fraud, dear, and that does not hold good before Heaven or man."

"I cannot believe it!"

"What?"

"That I am really to be yours at last. Oh, Walter, is such joy always behind blank despair?"

"I hope your despair is done, my poor dear. When your freedom is obtained, and you are mine, we will go away together—away where we can both learn to forget."

"I do not wish to forget, Walter. I want always to remember the great wrong which you have forgiven me. I want always to remember your generosity, your nobility. I want to remember that you are a god among men, so that my wild worship of you may not frighten me. Ah, Walter, it is the misery of the past that shows me the joy of the present by contrast! Without it I could not know, could not feel the thrill of exultant happiness that leaps through my veins."

He shaded her face, with its tremulous love, upon his bosom, and looked over her head into the shadows of the past.

His mental vision rested upon a small, dark, passionate face, that made his heart grow cold for the moment—cold with the fear of self.

He knew that he had never loved, could never love, as he loved Eden; but in that hour he planted flowers above its grave, cruelly holding down a struggling passion.

He would do his duty, he told himself. He had not been false to Doris, he had told her the truth; but he would repay her tenderness by never referring, even remotely, to that other love. If he must suffer, he would do it in silence, and some day he would learn to love her as she deserved in return for all her tenderness. She should never feel his neglect, never know but that she was first and best.

That vow he registered above her head as she rested in his arms, and to the end of his life he kept it.

The peace for which he prayed came later; and though forgetfulness never came, he learned to love his wife—if quietly, none the less tenderly.

CHAPTER XXXV.

As the ambulance bearing the suffering woman was driven from the door, the ominous report of a pistol, crisp and echoing, was heard, evidently proceeding from the floor above.

Lewis, followed by several others, hastily mounted the stairs and flung open the first door to which he came. There was no need to go further.

In the centre of the room, surrounded already by a pool of blood, Gordon lay, the still smoking revolver beside him.

"He has killed himself!" exclaimed Lewis, dazedly, laying his hand above the man's heart.

Some one pushed his way into the rapidly filling room.

"I am a doctor!" he cried. "Is there anything I can do?"

The crowd fell back to make room for the

medical man, and Lewis turned to him eagerly.

"I am afraid it is too late," he answered, with unusual feeling. "But do what you can."

The physician bent above the prostrate man, and ripping his vest and shirt away, examined the ghastly hole just above the heart.

He lifted his head hopelessly.

"He cannot live an hour, and may never regain consciousness," he said, grimly. "Put those people from the room, and help me to make him as comfortable as possible for the short time he has to live."

Together they removed the man's clothes, cutting them from his body, and placed a night-shirt upon him.

The doctor had stopped the terrible bleeding, and as he and Lewis stood looking upon the pale, cold face, the dark, bagged eyes opened. They were lifted wistfully.

He did not seem to suffer, but the shadow of death was already upon his brow.

"Where is Eden?" he asked, with painful effort.

A soft rustle of garments near the door was heard, and, before Lewis could answer, Eden stood beside them.

A gentle smile broke over his stiffening lips.

"I saved—your life—little one," he said, weakly. "Poor Alice! Will some one tell her that—I am sorry—her act recited—upon herself?"

Eden bent forward eagerly.

"Did not you do it purposely?" she asked, breathlessly.

"Throw that vitriol on her?" he inquired, in horrified astonishment.

"Yes."

"Oh, Eden! Am I not guilty enough—without you—charging me—with so cowardly—an act as that?"

"You did not then?"

"No."

"Thank Heaven for that! Oh, Wilfred, Wilfred, what have I done?"

"Nothing, child, nothing. Doctor, will you—not leave me—here with her? I—"

"One moment!" exclaimed the physician.

"You did this yourself?"

"Yes."

"You have but a few minutes to live. Shall I summon a clergyman?"

"No. Leave me the moments that I have."

The physician bowed, and with Jim Lewis left the room.

Eden drew a chair beside the bed, and took the hand of the suffering man in both her own. Her face was wet with tears.

"Why did you do it, Wilfred?" she cried, in a choked voice.

"Because—I had not the courage to face my life—without you. Eden—you are an angel—to speak to me—like this when—you know how I have—wronged you."

"She told the truth, then?"

"Did you doubt it?"

"I did—oh, I did!"

"It was true, dear—all true. But I never intended—to make you—my wife in—reality until I had—the legal right. You—will trust the word of—a dying man—and believe that—will you not?"

Swiftly memory returned to her. She thought of how reverently he had treated her in every instance, and the hardness that had crept into her heart softened.

"Yes, I believe you," she said, gently.

"And you—forgive me?"

"I do, from my soul."

"I never hoped for it. Even—in my dreams—I used to start up—feeling how—you would curse me—if you but knew. Try to—remember—dear—that it was all caused—by a strange—wild love, over which—I had no control whatever. I—have sinned—greatly. Perdition is—ready to receive me—yet dying—I would brave it—for one kiss—from your lips."

"Hush—oh, hush!" she cried, clasping his hand more closely and bending nearer to him. "It is so wicked—so wicked! Wilfred, you are standing almost in the presence of your Maker. Beseech His pardon. If I have forgiven, He can."

"To meet—you there—Tell me just once! Do—not be impatient. Let me—have these last—moments as—my own. If things had been—different—should you—ever have loved me?"

She thought an instant. With the memory of Bertie Staunton before her she knew that she could not, but if she had never met him—

"Yes," she answered. "I should have loved you!"

The radiance of his countenance repaid her.

"I—can—die now," he muttered, brokenly. "Eden—the end—is nearly here. Forget—forget—and—kiss me!"

She bent her head until his face was wet with her tears, then she pressed her lips upon his with gentle tenderness.

"It is—enough!" he whispered.

And with his eyes resting upon her face his soul departed, to find either rest or eternal ruin. Eden dared not think which.

She opened the door and gently called the doctor. He and Lewis came together.

The smile was still upon the white face, peaceful and loving.

Lewis seized Eden's hand.

"You made his last moments happy, miss?" he asked, brokenly.

"I tried."

"Heaven bless you for that! He was the only human being on earth I loved. He had his faults, but his virtues were those of an angel."

A silence fell upon them.

A white-faced woman, with disordered hair, had staggered into the room. She caught Lewis's hand in a grasp that was terrible.

"I got your note, Jim!" she cried, hoarsely. "For Heaven's sake, tell me it is not true!"

For answer he pointed silently to the bed, and the woman turned.

She neither moaned nor cried out, as her eyes rested upon the rapidly-stiffening features, but like a piece of animated stone she glided to his side and stood looking down upon him.

"No word of farewell to me," she whispered, in a dumb, emotionless way—"no thought even, when I would have given my life gladly for you. But what am I, that I should have expected it? I could only worship you from afar, but I did worship you, my prince, my hero! Dead! dead! dead!"

Slowly, as though life were giving way, she sank upon her knees, her head falling gradually to her lap.

Lewis laid his hand upon her head gently.

"He would not wish you to grieve, Catherine," he said, softly.

She lifted her stony face mechanically.

Her gaze, instead of falling upon Lewis, rested upon Eden. She dragged herself wearily to Eden's side, and lifted the hem of the dainty wrapper until her lips rested upon it.

"He loved you," she said, dully, "and because of that you are sacred to me. You seem a part of him. You will let me see you sometimes, will you not? You will pity me, because I have loved him even as he loved you, only with perhaps greater self-sacrifice."

"Poor Catherine!" Eden whispered—"poor, unhappy one!"

The small hand rested upon the woman's cold face, and turning her lips rapidly, Catherine kissed both palms.

It was Jim Lewis who sent a message to Herbert Staunton and Malcolm Carlton—Jim Lewis, the thief, whom the contact with death had converted to an honest man.

Tender and respectful as a loyal peasant to a queen he was to Eden. He knew how Gordon had wronged her, and that she should forgive him so fully and freely raised her to the level of the angels in Jim Lewis's eyes.

In the little stuffy parlour a bier rested.

Upon it Wilfred Gordon lay, his turbulent soul at peace. A calm smile remained upon his lips, and even death could not rob the dark, thrilling beauty that had characterised him in life. Few had understood his nature—few care to understand a thief—but under the influence of love the germs of nobility in his soul might have blossomed into wondrous beauty.

Beside him a bowed woman sat, strangely broken in spirit. Silver threads that had not been there twenty-four hours before glistened in the soft brown hair. She neither moved nor spoke; she did not seem even to think, though now and then a low, suppressed moan escaped the white lips.

Through the long hours of the night she sat there, her forehead bowed upon the icy hand of the dead. She was nervously herself to say a long farewell to the man she worshipped from afar, but it was the bitterest trial of a life filled with grief. He had saved her from death, protected her in life, had been her unfailing friend always, and she had allowed her wild, untutored heart to set him up as an idol. She had never expected any return. It was right that he should love another, and she loved that other for his sake; but he was hers in death, and the pale lips smiled as she kissed him.

Poor Catherine! The recompense was small for a life of suffering.

(To be continued.)

FIRE UNSEEN.

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CHAPTER XX.

The butler withdrew. The two were alone together, and Zitella was the first to speak.

"Hugo," she said, "my husband"—and the words were characteristic of the woman, whose thoughts and actions were never impeded by scruples of any kind.

The Marquis, however, was not now so ready to answer Zitella as he would have been long years ago. His love for a pure, beautiful girl had made him loathe all falsehood and sin. He stood now looking with troubled eyes out of a white face, at the embodiment of his old sin, not thought on or regretted until that morning in which he had seen Romola in the woods at Locksley Hall.

"Zitella," he said, at last, in a faint stammering voice, "I did not expect to see you here! I came to see another person on very important business!"

"Perhaps I may be able to help you, my husband!" said Zitella, as she motioned him to follow her into a little room on the left of the hall.

Here, when the door was shut upon them, the Marquis looked at his companion, and wondered what had become of the brilliant beauty which had dazzled his eyes long years ago, but had not touched his heart.

Nothing now remained of Zitella's charms but the large, dark eyes, which could still assume any look at will, though insolence was their prevailing expression; but in her face and features intemperance and paint had fore stalled the ravages of time, and as he looked at her the Marquis shuddered, and loathed the memory of his early sin.

"Well, my husband!" said Zitella, "what can I say to express my pleasure at this unexpected meeting?" And then, at last, the Marquis spoke.

"Three times, Mrs. Eyre," he said, quietly, "you have called me by a title which long ago we mutually decided did not belong to me."

"I was young and foolish," replied Zitella, assuming a soft expression; and I was so proud that, when I thought you did not love me, and that I should be a burden on you, I let you go; but it was no separation, as I now

very well know, and you, who were really my husband long ago, must be my husband to-day!"

The Marquis thought of Romola, but dared not give vent to the groan which rose from his heart; yet, in the depths of his misery and degradation, there was one gleam of comfort from the thought that his love for Romola had that day vowed itself to death for her sake. That day he had voluntarily given up the girl whose love he knew he would never win; but instinct told him that, if he would help Romola to win back her lover, he must not mention her name to Zitella.

"But you are married to another!" he said, at last. "You cannot wish, therefore, to proclaim to the world what must bring you disgrace, and perhaps worse?"

There was an angry glitter in Zitella's eyes as she interrupted eagerly,—

"You would tell me that the sin of bigamy is punishable by law; but I have not sinned, and I do not fear it. I married Valentine Eyre, believing you to be dead. I had heard of your death from the lips of one who professed to know you abroad. Whether he lied wilfully or not I cannot say, nor does it make any difference. But though I married Valentine Eyre," continued Zitella, defiantly, "I never cared one jot for him, and if I wish to leave him now he dared not oppose me!"

"But why should you wish to leave your husband, Mrs. Eyre?" asked the Marquis, with every appearance of surprise. "Valentine is rich and well-born, and, though a commoner, he stands higher than many men of title. I think," he added, "that there is no older name in all England than that of Eyre; and where would you find a fairer home than Chevenage Court?"

"You talk to me as if I were a child, without heart or feeling!" exclaimed Zitella, passionately. "Will the length of a pedigree, the splendour of a home, to which I have no right, satisfy me? Valentine Eyre is not my husband, and I hate him! You are my husband, and I love you. Voilà tout, mon cher;" and Zitella made a gesture, half petulant, half pleading, with her plump, jewelled hand.

The Marquis looked at her, and felt in his heart the heaviness and nausae which sooner or later follows sin. But though he saw that Zitella would be a bitter foe to fight against he did not fear her. Why should he, when she could not, by any possibility widen the gulf between himself and Romola? So, resolving to have done for ever with all falsehood, he said, quietly,—

"You have no right to love me, Zitella. And if the bond between you and Valentine Eyre could be severed to-morrow you would not come to me as my wife, for I was never your husband. Zitella, I did you a cruel wrong long ago, when I took advantage of your youth and innocence to go through a mock ceremony of marriage with you. It was no priest, Zitella, who joined our hands, but a worthless scamp, who gladly did my work for a trifling sum of money."

For several minutes Zitella could not speak. Fierce, ungovernable rage choked her utterance, and sent a swift wave of crimson to her cheeks.

In the first sight of the man whom she had vainly sought for years she had thought her title of marchioness all but secure. Now the very tone of the Marquis's voice convinced her of his truth. And if her hatred and anger could have slain him, Egerton, Marquis of Eastshire, would not have outlived those moments. But Zitella was not one to give up without a struggle, and at last she hissed forth,—

"Traitor! And do you dare to tell me such a story? Do you think I will either believe it or keep it secret? No, Marquis, the tale of the wrong you did me long ago shall be heard far and near; and even though my revenge on you may cost me my all, I shall not rest until it is complete!"

"As you will," replied the Marquis, indifferently. "But let me tell you, Zitella,

that this revenge which may injure you terribly cannot touch me. There is," he continued, "surely in all the world but one being for whose good opinion I care, and she shall hear the whole story of my life from my own lips!"

"You love this woman!" exclaimed the Spaniard, furiously.

"Yes, as the good love Heaven," replied the Marquis, reverently. "But you mistake if you think I would dare to tell her of my love, or ask her to be mine." He broke off with a sigh, and then added, in a different tone, "However, it was not to talk of love that I came here to-day."

"Why did you come?" asked Zitella, curiously; and the Marquis replied,—

"I heard that Mrs. Alingham was here, and I followed her, thinking that she might be able to give me some information concerning the whereabouts of my cousin, Churchill Penance."

"What do you want with him?" asked Zitella, who hated the young Englishman whom she had duped and betrayed long years ago.

"I have an account to settle with him," replied the Marquis; and misunderstanding his words, Zitella replied, eagerly.—

"Then that cat who is now with my husband must be made to tell you all she knows, for Churchill Penance is her friend. She wants him to marry this girl Romola, but he shall not if I can prevent it. I hate Churchill Penance! And though I do not love Romola, she shall know that the man who would be her husband is her father's murderer!"

"Her father's murderer!" repeated the Marquis, in amazement. "What is this, Zitella? I do not understand. Is not Romola Valentine Eyre's daughter? And is not Valentine Eyre alive and well at this moment?"

A peculiar light gleamed in the Spaniard's eyes as she replied,—

"Valentine Eyre has no child, and, as Mrs. Alingham knows, this girl and her brother are the children of Valentine Eyre's brother Hermann, whom Churchill Penance wilfully shot at Florence twelve years ago in mistake for Valentine Eyre. It was a mistake that cost me dear," she added, bitterly; "and I vowed to pay the assassin some day. Now, if you also hate him, you can settle my account with your own!"

The Marquis made no reply, he was puzzling deeply over what he had just heard. He felt there was a mystery which could not be quickly fathomed; but that there was falsehood and treachery he felt sure.

He went back in memory to the time when first he had made the acquaintance of Valentine Eyre. He could recall no mention of the children in England; but that Romola and Juan were the son and daughter of Valentine Eyre he had no doubt, and that they were being disowned for some evil motive he was equally convinced.

He determined to go quietly and carefully to work, and so frustrate the wicked designs of Valentine Eyre and his wife.

Zitella mistook the Marquis's silence for approval of her plans, and so, in quite a cordial tone, she pressed him to be her guest at Chevenage for a few nights, for in her swift, subtle fashion she argued that the best way to win the Marquis would be to get him to join hands with her in one cause.

"Our mutual hatred of Churchill Penance is one link between us," she said to herself; "and if I am careful others will be formed in time which will bind him to me firmly and for ever."

But Zitella forgot, when she entertained these thoughts, that a long and unrestrained indulgence in eating and drinking had greatly chilled her intellectual powers. However, when the Marquis accepted her invitation to remain at Chevenage she saw him already won.

Mrs. Alingham could not tell the Marquis anything about Churchill Penance. She be-

lieved he had gone abroad, but she said plainly that she did not wish to mention his name.

"He has broken my darling's heart," she murmured, bitterly. "I know not why he left her, but there can be nothing to explain away the fact that he has been dishonourable and heartless. He deserted my child in the hour when she stood in sorest need of his protection and love. It was a cowardly act, and I will never forgive him."

But when the Marquis had explained the whole cause of the separation Mrs. Alingham relented a little, and even longed to see Churchill Penance, that all might be put right, though she still thought that he had been harsh and cruel.

"His act was not that of a true lover," she said, sorrowfully; "but perhaps men never love truly, and if my darling forgives him so must I. Her happiness is all that I care for."

"Romola's happiness shall be secured," replied the Marquis, "even though the purchase is made with my life. I shall leave Chevenage Court this very day," he continued, "and by the love I bear this sweet and gentle girl I swear that I shall never rest until Churchill Penance has been found and all explained. Then," added the Marquis, rather bitterly, "it will be for him to beg pardon of Romola, though I do not doubt that he will win it easily, even though he has taken the life from which hers was drawn, and added to the wrong the insult of a doubt in his ladylove's truth."

"You have spoken most truly, Marquis," said Mrs. Alingham, with deep sadness; "for a true woman when she loves will love to the death. No falsehood, no coldness, no cruelty will cure a woman of the deadly disease which is called love. Let the sinner but come to her feet, and she will pardon and kiss the hand that may have struck her a most cruel blow; and an unseen fire burn best and longest so those women love most truly who make no sign. Romola is one of these; and though she has never spoken to me of her love for Churchill Penance, I know that she would die for him."

"She shall not die for him!" was the Marquis's emphatic rejoinder. "She shall live; and for her sake Churchill Penance must be made happy, though he is all unworthy of such a priceless jewel. But I can understand now," he added, bitterly, "why Heaven so often forbears to visit the sins of some men. It is because an angel in human guise stands between the guilty culprit and the sword of the avenging angel, and the wrath of Heaven is turned aside by the sight of that woman's purity and her love!"

The Marquis brought some gleam of hope and comfort to Mrs. Alingham's heart with these reassurances of happiness for the girl they both loved; and, in fulfilment of his words, he would have set out on his quest that very night; but that during dinner Zitella said, in her haughty, insolent way,—

"I wish Romola to come here and make my acquaintance. I shall send a message to her to-morrow, bidding her to be here without delay!"

"You forget that Romola is ill?" said Mrs. Alingham. "She has lain in danger of her life for weeks, and it will be long before she is able to travel!"

Zitella looked at the governess with a contemptuous, insolent glance, as much as to say,—

"Who asked for your opinion—or why should you dare to offer it unasked?"

Then, tossing her head, on which gleamed the jewels which belonged by right to the woman on whom she was heaping her scorn, Zitella went on,—

"Paha! Don't talk nonsense! I know exactly what is the matter with the girl, and I have a few words to say which will make her quite well."

Mrs. Alingham said no more, but she cast an apprehensive glance at the Marquis, who immediately resolved to remain at Chevenage Court, and at the same time to prosecute his

search for Churchill Penance. He would think of some means by which a letter might reach the absent lover, and bring him back, repentant and shame-stricken, to the feet of his love.

"I do not covet one smile, one thought, which belongs of right to my rival," said the Marquis, bitterly, "for my love is greater than his, and I would die a thousand deaths to bring Romola one throb of pleasure; but I will not leave her one moment exposed to the cruelty of that coarse, merciless woman."

And a shudder passed over the Marquis as he saw Zitella raise and drain the glass which had been filled and refilled three times. He scorned and loathed himself for sitting at this woman's table, even though he was there for Romola's sake; and then he looked from the wife to the husband, and wondered if it was Zitella's evil influence alone which had caused Valentine Eyre to change so much for the worse during the past twelve years.

The same thought had come to Mrs. Alingham's mind, bringing with it such agony that, when dinner was over, the governess hastened to the poorly-furnished apartment which had been assigned to her; and there dropping the mask which she had worn even in solitude through sixteen long years, Celia Eyre, Mrs. Alingham no longer, prostrated herself on the ground, and poured forth the anguish of her soul in wild tears and words.

"Oh, Heaven!" she wailed, "tell me what is right to do! How can I punish this man who has been exposed to temptation through my act? And if he is guilty, what am I? For had I remained his wife all this evil would never have come about. But whether I love him, or love him not, I must do no more wrong, and if I feel that it is right to fight for my children against my husband I must fight for them; but oh, Heaven! help me to do what is right, and to conquer!"

So Mrs. Alingham wept and waited through many long hours, deplored her error, and imploring Heaven's aid in proof of its pardon. She remembered the arguments which good old Doctor Maynard had used long ago to dissuade her of the step which she had resolved through blind pride and anger.

The very tones of her friend's voice came back to her, and his look, as he had told her that falsehood and deception never had but an evil harvest; and now the evil had come, and was about to fall, not on herself only, but on her lovely, innocent child.

But it must not fall! With burning tears Celia cried out that Heaven would not be so unjust as to punish Romola for her mother's sin.

But though she thought and prayed for some way of escape from the dangers which encompassed her, it never occurred to the unhappy woman that a way might be found if she were boldly to confront Valentine Eyre and prove his falsehood, with the acknowledgment that she was his true and lawful wife. But even had such a thought come to Celia she would have received it with shrinking heart, and only acted upon it when all else had failed.

Meanwhile, the Marquis, after much thought, had decided to send a letter to Churchill's club in London. There were several well known clubs of which he knew that his cousin was a member; and from any of these he thought that a letter might be forwarded to Churchill's present address, for it did not seem to him at all likely that his kinsman would have cut himself off from all communion with the world.

In pursuance, therefore, with this resolve, the Marquis spent the whole night in the writing of a letter to Churchill Penance.

It began with a full explanation of all that had passed between the Marquis and Romola. And then the writer passed on to the girl's illness, dwelling on it in words which were meant to pierce the reader's heart with a two-edged sword; for the Marquis was but human, and he might well be forgiven for hating a man who had so slighted a love which he, the

Marquis, would have given his very life to possess for one moment; but, for Romola's sake, the Marquis would make Churchill happy.

"And because of her," he said to himself, "I will not strike Churchill Penance as deeply as he deserves to be struck for his unmanly doubts and cowardly desertion of the girl to whom he had pledged his love and faith."

But the letter could scarcely have been more wounding, for every word was a dagger-thrust; and it ended up with the story with which Hermann had deceived Mrs. Alingham, and Churchill was made to understand that he was, in very deed, the assassin of Romola's father.

A few days passed, during which this letter was travelling from London on the track of Churchill Penance; and the Marquis was at Chevenage Court, waiting for the moment in which Romola should require his help and protection.

She arrived at last, but at the first sight of her the Marquis' heart died within him.

"As well," he told himself, bitterly, "he might hope to raise a gathered lily and set it once more on the stem from which it had been plucked as to hope that he could bring any healing to Romola." She had not only been plucked, but trampled upon, and as her heart was broken, it seemed to the Marquis that she must die.

"She must die!" he repeated again and again, as he looked at the sweet, stricken face and eyelids, which drooped, and had no care or strength to raise themselves.

It broke his heart to look at that crushed flower, and made him long to kill Churchill Penance; but, for the girl's sake, he forebore from even breathing a curse upon his rival.

But sad as it was to look at Romola in her illness and pain, it was joy compared to the torture of being shut out from her altogether; and this soon happened, for Romola had a relapse of the fever a few days after her arrival at Chevenage. And once again her young life trembled in the balance; and even such remorseful hatred and malice as Zitella's was driven back before the sight of the sick girl's face, and the sound of her piteous cries for her absent and estranged lover.

Mrs. Alingham remained at Chevenage Court, and nursed her child night and day. Never for rest or slumber did she leave her for one moment; and Zitella, thinking that death would snatch her victim from her grasp, allowed her fierce desire of vengeance to slumber for awhile.

If Romola lived she could torture her by-and-by, and meanwhile she consoled herself with her air castles, her dresses, and her wine, of which she drank far too freely, and under the influence of which she was wont to confide wildly to the Marquis that Romola had done her no wrong, but she hated her as she hated all women who were beautiful and beloved.

She would also declare that Valentine Eyre, her husband, was in her power, and she had but to speak the word which should compass his ruin.

All of which provided the Marquis with food for much anxious thought.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHURCHILL PENANCE left England, vowing never to return to it again. In the depths of his misery and despair he said that he would find some quarter of the globe where the face of a woman should never come before him.

He would reach some uninhabited island in far-off seas, where solitude would in time make him mad; and then, and only then, would he forget his love for Romola and her cruel falsehood to him.

He thought of his mother; but though he loved her, and though his heart bled for her as he pictured her grief, still the consideration was not strong enough to turn him aside from

his cruel and selfish purpose, which in his blind wrath and pain appeared to him a course which could only hurt himself, and perhaps his mother, for a time.

"My poor little mother!" said the weary, angry man; "but is it not best that she should learn to think of me as dead? Then her pain will cease, and as time heals such wounds as common loss, she will learn to forget me, and be all the happier because I shall no longer be there to be a continual source of anxiety and disappointment to her. And as for Romola," here Churchill laughed bitterly, "of course she will marry the Marquis of Basashire, and live happy for ever after, as the fairy tales books say; and sometimes, no doubt, my lady Marchioness will amuse herself with recollections of her old disengaged lover. She will tell her noble husband what a fool she made of Churchill Penance, and boast that he would have died for her lightest word."

So, with such bitter, self-destroying thoughts as these, Churchill Penance turned his back on England and civilisation, as he thought, for ever; and under a forged name he managed to find a berth in a trading vessel which was about to undertake a voyage round the world.

"From this vessel," thought Churchill Penance, "I will surely find some spot in which I may end my days apart from all communion with my fellow creatures!" And so he began his self-imposed torture by repelling all who ventured to address him; but at the end of a few weeks Churchill found himself punished for his misanthropy; for, instead of a desert island, he found himself landed in a seaport town on the coast of Spain.

A terrible fever had fallen upon him, and the captain of the ship had sent him on shore; and here, in this overpopulated town, Churchill Penance must have died but for the kindness of one human-hearted man. And by some strange working of fate this good Samaritan was none other than Martin, who had faithfully adhered to his resolve that he would never return to England until he had fathomed the mystery which he felt convinced enshrouded the fate of his master, Valentine Eyre.

So Martin had spent his time and the money which he had saved in wandering through Southern lands until poverty overtook him, and then he settled down in a seaport town, and for gain took to an occupation which had been one of the pastimes of a comparatively-prosperous boyhood.

It was a very humble occupation, being merely the manufacture of fishing nets; but Martin seemed to have a talent for making money, and very soon he was so well off that he took a little house for himself, and making it his head-quarters resumed, at intervals, his search for his master, in which, though always unsuccessful, he was never disengaged, for he told himself that Valentine Eyre and he must meet at last. But the years went by, and when Martin was beginning to think that he must resign his fondly-cherished hope, fate stepped in and accomplished all in her own unsalterable way.

Martin was now an old man; his hair was white, and his sight dim to what it used to be. But when a man called John Stevens was brought into his house Martin recognised Churchill Penance, and said to himself,—

"Whatever has brought him to this is no affair of mine; but what he did for my master once I'll do for him now!"

And so Martin put his sick guest into his own bed, and having sent for a doctor prepared himself to nurse Churchill Penance until he should be quite well.

But long before that day arrived Martin found reason to congratulate himself on his humanity, for as he listened to his patient's fevered cries of Romola and Valentine Eyre, he thought to himself that, with Churchill's illness, the mystery which enveloped his master must come to an end.

One evening, as Martin sat at the window of the sick room watching a great red sun

dying above the ocean, he heard his patient utter his mother's name in frequent, broken sentences; and this set the old man thinking, first of his own mother, who was linked with the happiest memories of his childhood, and then of poor little Mrs. Penance, who would be weeping out her heart away in England for some word of her absent son.

"I have never seen the lady," said Martin, to himself, as the sick man's voice rang through the room, "but that is not needful to tell me how she is mourning at this moment; for, bless my heart, all mothers are alike, and what son would be loved if it wasn't Mr. Penance?"

So, while Martin nursed the sick man, he thought pitifully of the mother away in England, until it suddenly occurred to him, like an inspiration, that he ought to write to Mrs. Penance and inform her of her son's situation, and once there the idea took a firm hold of Martin's mind.

But many days passed before Martin acted upon this idea, for there was more than one consideration which prevented his doing so. First of all he did not know where Mrs. Penance lived; but, when this difficulty had been smoothed away by the suggestion of some well-known club in London, from which the letter would be surely forwarded, Valentine still hesitated, because he shrank from being the one to strike death to a mother's heart; for in these days Churchill was so ill that it seemed as if Mrs. Penance could only reach Spain to find her son dying or dead.

At the end of a few days, however, there was a favourable crisis, and from that day Churchill began slowly but surely to mend; and one day he was so well that Valentine could scarcely refrain from a shout of joy. But he found a safer vent for his feelings in a letter to Mrs. Penance, which, when written, was directed to a club in London, of which, to Martin's certain knowledge, Churchill Penance had once been a member.

That letter, written in such hope, was crossed on its homeward way by one which had been travelling from one to another of Churchill's old haunts. It was the letter penned by the Marquis, and it reached its proper destination, one day, when Martin was beginning to entertain grave doubts that his patient would ever recover his lost health.

At the sight of an English letter, all covered with foreign post-marks, the faithful Martin felt his eyes grow dim with a rush of emotion which would have done credit to a man of nobler birth. He held the envelope away from him, while his hand shook as he gazed at some strange thing. "Churchill Penance, Esq.," he read, "Care of Mr. Martin." And then followed the name and number of the house and town, though how the letter had found its owner out Martin could not then imagine; but he learned afterwards that it was due to the captain of the trading vessel who had brought Churchill here some weeks ago.

"Heaven grant there is some good news in this!" said Martin, breathlessly. "Somehow I feel as if there is," and then with lightened heart the good creature carried the letter to Churchill, who took it listlessly, as a thing which could not possibly contain anything to interest him.

Martin withdrew without a word, but his anxiety would not let him go far away; and so, hovering about the next room, he conceived the idea of watching his patient's face through the door, which stood a little way ajar between them.

He saw Churchill Penance just glance at the envelope, and then lay aside the letter unopened, and Martin felt his heart sink as he looked; for a thing that was received with such indifference, could not be, in his opinion, a harbinger of good.

But this did not last long, for Martin presently saw Churchill take up and open the letter; and in the first glance at the contents his pale, weary face underwent such a sudden and marvellous change that Martin did not

know whether he ought to cry out for joy, or tremble for fear.

He decided, however, before many minutes were passed; for as Churchill read on his face grew ashen white, as if a sword had suddenly pierced him. The paper shook in his thin hands, and heart-wrung cries came from his lips, until Martin could scarcely restrain his anxiety. At length, as if unable to bear more, Churchill dropped the paper to the floor, and sat for a moment stock still as a stone; then, as his hands went up, and his head fell forward, Martin rushed to his side, to find that his patient had fainted, and to reprimand himself bitterly for his want of caution.

* * * * *

It would be impossible to paint the darkness of the days during which Romola lay once more in the shadow of death.

The Marquis, who had not even the consolation of being allowed to enter the sick room, would not believe that the grim reaper was nigh at hand.

He wandered in the woods round Chevening Court, and saw the stately trees decked in their fairest beauty, the meadows and fields laden with the ripening harvest, and he cried out that his love must not die.

It was impossible that delight could die a sudden death; and how could the world go on when the most beautiful young life it held had ceased to be? The birds must cease to sing, the sun to shine, when Romola was no more, but it could not be that she was going to die. A thousand, nay, ten thousand times a day the Marquis would cry out against this darkening of all light and hope upon earth, for to him Romola was the world. His love had grown to such a height at this. Romola was his light, his star, his one hope upon earth, and with her life his must end then. Ten thousand times a day, in some solitary part of the dense, green woods the man would fall on his knees, pray with heart and soul that he might be allowed to die in this young girl's stead, or at least before her.

And in the darkened chamber a mother was keeping breathless watch over the child who had never been so precious as now; and as she watched and told herself that it would be doubly, trebly hard to give back her child to the grave from which she had snatched her a few days ago, Mrs. Alingham almost cursed the man for whose sake she was now reaping all this sorrow and pain. And if Herman had had any chance of forbearance from Mrs. Alingham he lost it in these days.

But Romola did not die, though the days were long, and the struggle fierce. She escaped with her life, but the last harvest in England had been carried home and stored before the sick girl was able to leave her room.

But she lived, and though he might not see her this was joy enough to turn the Marquis's brain.

He heard that Romola would live, and rushed away to a solitary spot to pour out his thanks to Heaven for a mercy that he did not deserve.

"Heaven has granted me this boon for Romola's sake!" said the Marquis from his heart; and then he wandered about in solitude for several days, avoiding all companionship because of Zitella, who would, he dreaded, read his secret in his face, and visit her jealous fury on the hapless object of his love.

One day Romola lay on a couch in the window, which had been opened so that the sweet-morning breeze might blow on her colourless face and aching brow, round which her dark tresses were beginning to grow once more in tiny silken rings, that lay like jet on the veined marble skin.

The very dumb things in the room might have found a voice to cry out for sorrow of Romola, whose attitude and mien betokened a sadness deeper and darker than that of death.

Her pale hands lay folded on her breast like those of a dead maiden, and on the table by her side lay a bouquet of exquisite white

flowers, the rarest and costliest that could be procured.

The Marquis had sent them in, accompanied by a note containing words the tenderest and most respectful which the heart of a hopeless lover could convey; but though the flowers filled the whole room with their delicate fragrance the sick girl had never raised her weary lids to reward the Marquis with one glance at his beautiful gift. How could she look at flowers when the hope of her whole life was utterly dead?

Even when a step fell beside her couch Romola did not open her eyes, though she tried to smile, thinking it was Mrs. Alingham who stood by her couch. Then, turning her head on the pillow she said, wearily,

"How slowly the day wears on, Nounie. I am so tired of this, and it seems hours since I get up. Oh! when will night come—deep, dark night? I long for night, and a rest that will be as death!"

"Nonsense, child!" replied a voice with a cruel, hard ring in it. "You are too young to talk such rubbish. You must give it up and get well, or people will say that you are breaking your heart for your father's murderer."

Poor little Romola's heart was already almost beyond the consciousness of pain, but she stretched out her small, wasted hands as if to ward off some terrible thing; and then forcing herself to open her eyes, she turned them with hatef ul look.

"What do you mean, Mrs. Eyre?" asked Romola, faintly.

Zitella hesitated a moment, not from scruples of pity or remorse, but because, though it was still early in the day, her brain was already clouded with wine, and she scarcely knew how to wing her cruel shaft. But after a brief silence she replied, with a coarse laugh,

"Oh, I thought you would not require any telling to know who I meant. But it's that precious Churchill Penance who made you an orphan twelve years ago, and now would have broken your heart if your uncle hadn't turned up at a lucky moment and put an end to his wicked plans."

"What do you mean?" gasped Romola, faintly, not daring to believe that she had heard aright. "Oh, Heaven!" she went on, "what is it? Am I so weak or so mad that I cannot understand you?"

Zitella laughed harshly,

"You must ask that Mrs. Alingham of yours to explain it all to you," she said in hard tones, "for I cannot trouble myself; though why you did not hear it all long ago I can't imagine. But now I have only this much to say, child, that I'm your uncle's wife, and mistress here; and, though I mean to be kind to you, I tell you plainly that I can't stand any moping and moaning. It's dull enough here, Heaven knows, without having a love-sick girl for my constant companion. So, if you and I are to agree, you had better make up your mind to forget Churchill Penance, though I don't think you'll want to think of him when you know that he is your father's murderer!"

With these cruel words Zitella swept away, leaving Romola too stunned and shocked for feeling. But when the last rustle of the Spaniard's silk robe had been heard in the corridor the recoil came, and sharp and bitter beyond all power of description were the tortures that Romola endured.

But the girl's feelings were at first all centred in anger against this woman who had come with wanton cruelty to insult and stab her heart.

Hot, fierce anger it was that in its first moments gave Romola strength to rise on her couch, and pour forth passionate denunciations of Zitella.

"How dared she! how dared she!" cried the girl. "How dared she come to me with this false, wicked story! Churchill Penance, my friend, my love—wicked, a murderer!

Oh! no, no! It is this woman who is cruel and wicked! Why did I not tell her so? Why did I listen to her? Oh! Heaven!" the poor child's voice rose in the agony of her heart to a piercing cry. "Oh! Heaven! why am I left alone, unprotected? Is there no one to help me?"

Here the poor child's false strength failed her as suddenly as it had come, and she sank back upon her pillows white and trembling, like a lily-leaf in the storm-wind. Then when her grief and helpless terror had reached its height the door opened, and she heard a quick step and a tender voice.

"I am here, Miss De Nuns, Romola, to help, to protect and be your friend, if you will let one who would die to serve you claim that title."

"You?" ejaculated the girl, in surprise; for she had opened her eyes, and that glance fell upon the Marquis, who was now kneeling by her couch.

"Yes," he replied. "It is for your sake only that I am here, in this house. I promised that I would bring your lover back to you, and if he lives on this earth I will keep my word. But I remained here, fearing you might want protection; and now, when I heard that woman speaking to you as she did just now, I knew I had done right."

Romola's eyes flashed, and her pale cheeks flushed. Her anger was returning, and with it the false strength which enabled her to say, in clear, ringing tones,—

"You heard that woman insult me, and revile the man I love. Well, you know Churchill Penance; and as you say you would serve me, you can do so now by saying that woman's story is a wicked falsehood. That Churchill Penance, my lover, is a true man, and not what she called him."

"She called him a murderer!" replied the Marquis, and then he paused. A terrible temptation had assailed him, and for a moment he looked it almost longingly in the face.

Why could not he now win favour for himself by denouncing Churchill Penance?

If this story was true who could call him dishonourable for vindicating its truth, and should he shrink from trying to win Romola?

True there were follies, errors in his past life; but was he as unworthy as the man who had committed a crime?

"Why do you not answer me?" asked Romola, feverishly, almost fiercely; and as he looked into her dark eyes the Marquis started back.

He was saved. In the clear depths of the girl's eyes he had seen everything which made the thoughts which assailed him so black and foul that he turned from them once for all in shuddering horror.

"Why do you not speak?" repeated Romola. "Your silence is like the confirmation of that woman's cruel lie!"

The Marquis took the poor child's hand in his, and said, gently,—

"Forgive me, Romola! I was thinking in what words I might tell you that though Valentine Eyre and his wife have written proofs to show that Churchill Penance is your father's murderer I do not believe the story, and I never will. I have written to Churchill; and when the letter reaches him I have not the faintest doubt that he will write denying every word of your uncle's story."

Romola was silent for a moment, and front the whiteness of her face, and the sudden drooping of her head, the Marquis thought she had swooned; but when his arm would have supported her she raised her eyes to his, saying, with choking sobs,—

"Oh, how happy you have made me!—how happy! I cannot thank you; but I shall bless you for these words to the last hour of my life!"

"You will not," replied the Marquis, brokenly, "when you know how strongly I was tempted to speak differently. I love you, Romola, and it was hard to help the man who



[UNABLE TO BEAR MORE, CHURCHILL DROPPED THE PAPER TO THE FLOOR, AND SAT STILL AS A STONE!]

has won your heart; but, thank Heaven, I did it!"

"Thank Heaven! indeed," replied Romola, with deep emotion; "for now, though I may never love you as you deserved to be loved, I shall always think of you as the noblest man that breathes. Oh, you have made me happy! I feel quite well. I can bear anything now; but understand," she added, gravely, "that even if you had told me this woman's story was true I would not have believed it; and even though I were convinced of its truth, and my heart were broken, I would have gone on loving Churchill all the same; but still I am glad that you proved yourself so noble!"

"It is you who have made me noble," replied the Marquis, and raising the young girl's hand he pressed on it a kiss of such reverence that even Churchill must have seen it with one jealous pang.

"You have been kindness itself to me, my friend, but it would have been better had you allowed me to die, though I will not wrong you by supposing that you would have done so had you known who and what I am."

The words were wrung from Churchill Penance, but they won no other answer than an earnest look from Martin; and leaning back in his chair the sick man hid his face in his hands, and groaned aloud in very bitterness.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed at last, in broken accents, "if men keep silence as to what I am;" and then, drawing down his fever-wasted hands, Churchill Penance turned a white, wan face to Martin's, and went on, "Do you know what I am? A murderer, and not only that, but the murderer of a man whose life should have been sacred in my eyes!"

He paused, and turned away his face for a moment; but, instead of looking horror-stricken and incredulous, Martin's countenance lighted up as if a gleam of eager sunshine had kindled it, and the voice in which he echoed those words, "a murderer," was almost joyful.

"Yes, a murderer," repeated Churchill Penance, in a tone whose pain was impossible to describe. "Ah, Martin, you are shocked, incredulous, but if you knew the name of him who fell by my hand, even your charity could not withstand the horror of the discovery. You would turn from me with hatred and curses."

"I don't think I should, sir," replied Martin, emphatically. "For I don't call it murder when a life is taken in the heat of passion, when, maybe, a hasty word has been spoken, and so the deed is done, sir. And though I don't stand up for murder, I would not be the one to call you or any other man by a harsh name; and I'm thinking that if the dead could come back he'd be the first to clasp your hand and say you'd done no more than he'd have done in your place."

Here Martin paused rather abruptly, as if he had suddenly occurred to him that he was not very coherent; and Churchill said sadly,—

"You judge me mercifully, Martin; but if I were to tell you that it was one you loved whom I had murdered you would look at the matter in a different light."

"Well, try me, sir, and see if I will," was the eager rejoinder; and Churchill gazed at his companion in puzzled silence for a few moments; then, as new light began to break in upon him, he exclaimed faintly,—

"Is it possible, Martin, that you know all, and, knowing it, that you can look in kindness on the murderer of your master and the father of my own dear love?"

"Valentine Eyre!" cried Martin, and his face grew crimson with excitement, then deadly pale, as he sprang to his feet and clenched Churchill's hand between his own trembling ones. "Valentine Eyre!" he repeated wildly. "For Heaven's sake tell me all about it; tell me where and when this deed was done."

Churchill Penance withdrew his hand from the other man's grasp, and dropping his head upon his arms groaned aloud,—

"I knew, Martin," he said at last, "that this knowledge would embitter you against me. Who will condemn me if not you, who loved your master with no common love? But remember, it was not of my own will that I sought your kindness, or came under your roof. But, Martin, I am bewildered and weak, and this sudden news has confused my brain. It seems it was not your master, Valentine Eyre, whom I shot in Florence, but a brother of his, and Romola's father, but I cannot speak of it," he added with a bitter groan. "There is the letter; you can read all!"

Martin needed no second bidding, and for nearly a quarter of an hour there was dead silence in the room; but at length, at a sudden exclamation from his companion, Churchill looked up.

"Well," he said sadly, "you see what I am now?"

"I see, sir," cried Martin, breathlessly, "that we have been made the victims of a foul trick as ever was played. You are no assassin, Mr. Churchill Penance, for the man you fired at in Florence lives this day, and as sure as there is a Heaven he shall answer for my master, Valentine Eyre!"

(To be continued.)

THE last wills and testaments of the greatest three men of modern ages were at one time tied up in one sheet of foolscap at Doctors' Commons. In the will of the bard of Avon is an interlineation in his own handwriting: "I give unto my wife my brown best bed with the furniture." It is proved by William Bryde, 22nd July, 1616. The will of the minstrel of Paradise is a nuncupative one, taken by his daughter, the great poet being blind. The will of Napoleon is signed in a bold style of handwriting; the codicil, on the contrary, written shortly before his death, exhibits the then weak state of his body.



"THERE WAS NO NEED FOR AN INTRODUCTION!" MARY SAID, COLDLY. "I AM ONLY YOUR SISTER'S GOVERNESS!"

NOVELETTE.]

A TANGLED WEB.

—:—

CHAPTER I.

THE schoolroom door was slowly opened, and a dark face appeared in the aperture.

"Have the children been good this morning, Miss Gresham?" asked a cheerful voice, belonging to the honest cheerful face.

"Very good, Mr. Tempest," answered the governess, gently.

"Then I am justified in asking for a holiday—"

"Oh, Ronald, how nice!" broke in the eldest pupil, a small mite of ten. "Say we may have one, Miss Gresham—please do!"

"You had a holiday on Monday, Minnie."

"Ah! but this is a special occasion. Arthur is coming home, and I propose taking these youngsters to meet him. Let them go."

"Oh, do!" pleaded Minnie. "Arthur is our big brother, you know, and is away at Cambridge, and we haven't seen him since—since ever so long!"

The governess smiled.

"I suppose I must say yes, then, Minnie; but understand you are to have no more holidays before Christmas."

"Seven whole days off!" laughed Mr. Tempest, advancing into the centre of the room. "What a terrible threat! Now, children, run away and dress very quickly, or we shall miss the train!" and, as they hastened to obey, Ronald went nearer to the slender slip of a girl standing shy and confused before him.

"Will not you come, too, Miss Gresham?" he asked.

"I? Oh, no, thank you!" and it hurt the young fellow to see how surprised she was by his little kindness.

"But why not?" he urged. "The morning is simply delightful, and if you wrap up well you will not feel the cold."

"It is not that, Mr. Tempest, but Mrs. Verral would be displeased."

"I don't see why she should."

"I am only the governess, and do not stand upon your level," the girl answered, with a faint sound of bitterness in her sweet voice.

"You are a lady," the young man said, a trifle warmly; and then she made the following astonishing reply,—

"I do not know what I am."

He stared at her a moment in unmitigated surprise; then, thinking she referred to her undefined position in the house, turned to another—and he hoped—less painful topic.

"When does your holiday commence?"

"I am not entitled to one, Mr. Tempest. I only came here a month ago."

"Then Christmas will be a dull time for you and your friends. It is a shame to keep you from home at such a time."

"I have neither friends nor home," and the quick tears rose to the lovely, winsome grey eyes. "I am all alone in the world."

"Forgive me," he said, quickly. "I seem born to wound you; and Heaven knows I would not willingly do so. I had no idea you were an orphan. Poor child!"

"Ronald, Ronald! Where are you?" called a thin, high-bred voice, at the sound of which the girl dashed aside her tears, and the young man, frowning, replied,—

"Here, aunt—in the schoolroom."

The next moment a lady entered, and casting one swift glance of anger at the girl, turned graciously to Ronald.

"What are you doing here, you naughty boy? Don't you know this room is sacred to the children and Miss Gresham?"

"I was waiting for the children," he answered, a trifle coldly. "But I will not trespass again, Aunt Agatha," and with a bow to the girl he left the room.

But Mrs. Verral stayed a moment behind to say quickly and insolently,—

"You understand, Miss Gresham, I do not allow my governesses to entertain my male

guests here. A repetition of this offence will be very summarily dealt with," and allowing the girl no time to reply, she sailed from the room.

Then that poor young thing sank on a chair, and throwing her arms out before her, buried her tortured face upon them, and a shudder passed over the slender frame.

"Oh, dear Heaven!" she sighed, "why should there be such a difference between me and others? What is my fault? How could she speak so cruelly to me? I had done nothing to merit her anger, and a kind word is like manna to me."

With an impatient gesture she pushed the heavy brown hair from her temples, and, rising, walked to a window, where she stood long, looking down upon the lovely white world spread out before her. And the sweet eyes were heavy with unshed tears; the pale face had grown a shade paler and sadder.

As she stands there, so silent and motionless, let us see what manner of maid she is.

Scarcely above the medium height, but looking taller because of her extreme fragility and slender build, with a small, pale face, upborne, flower-like, on a milk-white throat; a pair of large, luminous grey eyes; a sensitive, proud mouth, and clear-cut features of a very *spirituelle* type. And all about the broad brow, low upon the snowy neck, waved heavy masses of nut-brown hair. A beautiful girl, and only eighteen, with an air of melancholy sad to see in one so young and fair.

Oh! it was bitter indeed to stand alone in the world—to have no friends, no home, no certain knowledge of her own identity. Surely, Mrs. Verral need not have added to her grief.

It was with some such thought as this she turned at last from the window, hearing the sound of merry voices in the courtyard below.

So he had come at last—the darling son and heir; and as she listened to the joyous greetings Mary Gresham's heart and courage failed her, and sinking on her knees she cried,—

"Oh, Heaven! in mercy let me die! My desolation is more than I can bear!"

But she was not left long undisturbed. Swift, light steps approached the school-room, and, starting up, the girl waited for Minnie to enter.

"Oh, Miss Gresham, Arthur has come, and he is going to stay with us a whole month; and, if you please, mamma says you're to go down to the library at once, she has some letters she wants you to write. And Lily Dornton has come, and mamma says she's engaged to marry my brother Arthur. She is very rich, you know, and pretty; but not so pretty as you, only she has got money and you haven't, so people are sure to like her best." Then this small counterpart of Mrs. Verral disappeared, leaving Mary to follow as she would.

The girl went quickly downstairs, to find the lady of the house chattering to her young visitor, to whom she did not think it necessary to introduce her governess.

"I want you to receive these invitations, Miss Gresham. I have left you a list of names, and I hope you will work industriously, as they must all be out to-day. Come, Lily, Jimcheon waits."

But the young lady paused in the doorway to say,—

"I am afraid you will be very tired before you have finished, Miss Gresham! I wish I could help you," and the pleasant smile she gave Mary warmed the poor, forsaken heart, so that she said,—

"How ungrateful I am! Twice I have heard kind words spoken to-day. The world is not so hard as I believed."

She wrote on industriously, and as Mrs. Verral's injunctions were not to be lightly disobeyed she dared not stay to eat her mid-day meal; but about three o'clock wine and sandwiches were carried in to her, and she did not guess that this was at her new friend, (Mr. Tempest's), instigation.

The short afternoon was closing in, and she was half afraid to ring for lights, the servants being busy, and always careless of her summons; so she sat straining her eyes in a vain endeavour to finish her task, when the door opened, and a young man entered.

By the faint glow of the firelight she could not see his features, but concluding it was Ronald, said,—

"If you please, Mr. Tempest, would you be so good as to ask for lights? I have some writing to finish, and it has grown so dark."

"You are mistaken," said a strange voice. "I am Arthur. How stupid of mother not to warn me the library was occupied!"

Then he came a little nearer, and as the flames suddenly brightened and flickered across the exquisite face, a look of unmistakable admiration leapt into the bright blue eyes,

"It is very absurd, and abominably rude for me to say I do not remember you. We must perform the ceremony of introduction ourselves."

"There is no need for an introduction," Mary answered, coldly. "I am only your sister's governess."

If she had expected to see his face change and grow colder she was mistaken. The young fellow only put out his hand, saying,—

"Then we must be good friends. I have heard a great deal of you, Miss Gresham, from Minnie and Dot. I cannot feel as though you are a stranger."

She glanced at the door, fearful lest Mrs. Verral should find them together, and place her own construction upon that innocent meeting. Then she said,—

"If you please, Mr. Verral, I have a number of notes to write yet—"

"You wish me to go? Well, to hear is to obey, although I would rather stay here. This is a favourite room of mine. But I shall see you at dinner?"

"No; I dine with the children."

"But you surely put in an appearance in the drawing-room?"

"Yes, when my accompaniments are in request, not otherwise."

"What a shame! It isn't fair to keep you cooped up in such a fashion."

"Mr. Verral, will you please leave me?" desperately. "I cannot afford to lose my situation, and your mother would be angry to find you here."

"I do not think so."

"I am sure of it. Please do not stay another moment," and something in the winsome, sorrowful eyes compelled his obedience.

But all that night he thought a great deal more than was wise or well of the lovely little governess, whose beauty so far eclipsed Lily Dornton's.

He knew his mother's wishes regarding that young lady, but he was not at all prepared to gratify them, and felt highly indignant when he found she was constantly thrust upon him—his companion walking or driving, his partner at whist—the accompanist of his song—and complained bitterly of these things to Ronald Tempest.

"Well," said the latter, "why don't you make a stand against it? You could easily do so."

"Yes, and have the master in a towering rage for the next six months. She means me to marry Lily, and I mean to please myself, so we are playing cross-purposes."

"I would make a clean breast of it if I were you, Arthur."

"Would you? You don't understand how nasty my mother could make things for me. By my father's will I am a minor until my twenty-fourth birthday; and even then, if I marry to displease her, she takes all, and I nothing. Now, I put it to you, what can a fellow, brought up as I have been, do in such a case?"

"Either conform to his parent's will, or set to work manfully to earn an honest livelihood."

"It's all very well for you to talk, who have no one to please but yourself; but let us drop the unsavoury subject. By-the-way, Ronald, what a lovely little creature the governess is!"

"Do you think so?" coldly.

"By Jove, I do! Did you ever see such hair, such eyes and complexion? But she looks far too sad for one so young and lovely. I am afraid she has known some great trouble."

"Probably she has known many. She told me only this morning that she is homeless and friendless. Only think of it, that young thing!"

"You seem to be on very confidential terms," said Arthur, rather irritably.

"We are not; I had not exchanged half-a-dozen words with her until this morning, and then your mother was tremendously savage about it, I know, although she said nothing to me about the matter."

"She was too wise for that. I reckon Miss Gresham had to bear the brunt of her anger, poor little soul! The master is a hard one to please."

"And any expressed admiration of yours won't make things easier for Miss Gresham."

"Oh, I know! My mother has a rooted antipathy to girls who are not heiresses; and the worst of it is, the wealthy girl is unusually ugly, whilst the poor one gets all the grace and beauty."

"You don't call Miss Dornton ugly, I suppose?"

"Oh, she is the exception that proves the rule; and, of course, I can see she is intended for me. But I have enough of my own, (if the master is reasonable), to dispense with a fortune and my wife. But let us talk of something else. I am sick of the subject."

The next night, as Mary sat alone, she received a message from Mrs. Verral to the effect that she was to go down to the drawing-room, being wanted to accompany some songs. She stole a look at herself in the little mirror, and sighed as her glance rested on the plain brown dress, the spoils of collar and cuffs.

It was hard to have such a taste for pretty things, and yet be unable to gratify it; harder still to go down amongst those beautifully-

dressed girls and matrons, to be with them but not of them.

Smoothing the rebellious hair with little white hands she turned, and went slowly downstairs, to enter the drawing-room shinkingly, her fair face flushed with confusion, her eyes so downcast that she did not see the kindly smile Lily gave her. No one else noticed her, and she stole her way through the laughing throng to the piano.

Then Mrs. Verral spoke.

"You will accompany Mr. Mathie with 'The Scout, Miss Gresham,'" and something in her tone drove the blood lustily into Mary's face, and over the fair, white throat.

Mr. Mathie sauntered towards the piano. There was no need for haste; the girl was only a governess, and not entitled to much consideration.

But, if he thought thus, there was one in the room who did not share his opinion. Ronald Tempest had risen, and now stood by Mary, altogether regardless of his aunt's frowning looks.

"Allow me," he said, courteously, and forthwith began to turn the leaves of music; and somehow, his presence gave Mary a sense of rest and protection. No one but he needed it; she were weary, unless indeed it was Arthur, who stole furtive looks at her now and again, and she was faint with the duties of the day. Perhaps Ronald saw this, for in a pause of the playing, he said,—

"Let me bring you some coffee, Miss Gresham. You look half dead!"

"Oh, no!" she began, hurriedly, "Mrs. Verral would not like it."

But he was already away, and returning presently with the fragrant beverage bade her drink it; and, although she obeyed, she was miserably conscious that her employer's cold and cruel eyes were bent sternly upon her.

A little later Mrs. Verral sailed across the room.

"Your services are no longer required," she said, in an offensive tone. "You may go to your room, I am sorry you have so quickly forgotten my warning."

Glad to escape, the poor child hurried to her bare, little chamber; and there, falling on her knees, prayed Heaven that she might not be sent away, for she moaned,—

"I have no home! no home! and I dare not face the cruel world!"

She had hoped to be so happy here, and now she was so wretched that she thought of death with dreadful longing.

"At this season of the year all are glad but me," she murmured. "Oh, what a mockery all this mirth seems—to me!"

That night she cried herself to sleep.

The next morning Mrs. Verral took her nephew to task for his behaviour of the previous night.

"Really, Ronald, you made yourself quite conspicuous with Miss Gresham, and I do not think it hind to pay her attentions that must end in nothing. You will only injure the girl."

"I do not understand what you mean by attentions, aunt!" the young fellow answered, proudly. "I was but ordinarily civil."

Mrs. Verral lifted her shapely shoulders.

"It was very pronounced civility!"

"Not nearly so pronounced as the insolence with which most of those present treated the poor girl. My blood boiled to see it!"

The lady's face flushed.

"You forgot what you imply, Ronald. I behaved towards Miss Gresham as I should to any other inferior. I have no vulgar sentiments, and I do not believe in rating people above their level. Further, the meanness a repetition of last night's nonsense will result in Miss Gresham's instant dismissal. I do not wish my nephew to make a *mésalliance*."

"You are looking far ahead; but let me say, aunt, now, that there may be no further misunderstanding between us; that if I choose I would marry your kitchen-maid, provided she were virtuous and not too hopelessly ignorant. Further, that I have never spoken one word to

Miss Gresham that all the world might not hear; and it is a shameful thing to visit any shortcomings of mine upon her head," and with that he walked out of the room.

CHAPTER II.

In her own mind Mrs. Verral resolved that her male visitors should be allowed to see as little of the governess as possible.

"I won't have any nonsense of that kind take place in my house," she thought. "The girl shall keep her position; but I would rather not part with her—I won't unless compelled. She is clever and submissive; and she is very cheap, too. That is the advantage of having an orphan for a governess, only I wish she were not so remarkably pretty. Lily looks quite commonplace beside her!"

And then, it being Sunday morning, she went with her party to church, where her devotion was something wonderful to see. Mary sat in a little pew apart, with the two children; and one heart ached for her, one pair of eyes were full of compassion, noting her dejected looks, the shiver which occasionally passed over her, and which she could not wholly repress—for the church was cold, and her jacket too thin to impart any warmth. And close by sat the ladies in their velvets and furs, a little farther off the country-women in their comfortable shawls, which Mary almost envied, but which were forbidden to one in her position. Her position, poor child! The veriest drudge there was happier and more fortunate than she!

She did not appear that day in the drawing-room, and Ronald Tempest was angry with himself that he thought so much of the pale girl, and longed so ardently to look in the deep, grey eyes, whose sadness so appealed to him. And on Monday evening he started early with Arthur to pay a visit to an old college friend. But their journey was destined to have a most disastrous end. Returning home the horse shied; and before Ronald, who was driving, could in any way control him, he slipped on the frozen snow, tried to recover himself, but failed, and the next moment he had thrown the young men, and was down on the road, kicking and planking until the dog-cart was a wreck, and Ronald, who was only a little shaken, had rushed to his head and secured him. Then he turned to look for Arthur, only to find him lying quite still upon the road.

"Are you much hurt, old fellow?" he asked, anxiously, and slowly Arthur dragged himself erect.

"I feel as if I'm bruised to a jelly; and Jove!" with a groan, "I've broken my left arm."

"Nonsense old chap! Perhaps it is only a sprain."

"Do you think that I'm such a fool as not to know the difference? And of course there isn't such a thing as a conveyance within a mile. You must lead the brute, Ronald, until we get to Black's, leave him there, and I'll go on to old Hough's, and get this set."

"You're not fit to go alone," Ronald said, solicitously. "You look more like fainting than walking."

"Oh, I shall be all right; but I wish," with an oath, "that confounded beast had dropped dead in his stable before I got this hurt!"

But Ronald insisted upon accompanying his cousin; and, meeting a villager a little way from the scene of the accident, they entrusted the frightened beast to him, going on together to Dr. Hough's. And the bone being satisfactorily set, and Arthur nerved by a glass of cognac, they proceeded to the Manor, where the lamentations over the young man were loud and terrible.

Lily Dorston grew quite white, and her pretty blue eyes were full of such tenderness that Ronald felt afraid for her.

"Oh, what a fuss you women make!" Arthur said, petulantly. "For Heaven's sake leave me alone, I am all right!" and as it to

give the lie to his words he quietly fainted away.

The swoon, however, was of short duration, and Arthur himself seemed little the worse the next morning for his accident. He was somewhat paler, and his eyes were rather languid, but Lily privately thought that the pallor and languor made him but the more interesting.

All conspired to make much of him, and it was pleasant to lie on the luxurious couch and accept all caresses and attentions as his due. It flattered his self-love, and he began to think the rôle of invalid rather jolly than not.

A skating party had been arranged for the afternoon, but, owing to the accident, most of the guests suggested staying at home, only this Arthur would not hear of.

"He should prefer solitude. Perhaps he should sleep; his head ached so confoundedly that a doze would be good for him," and so on.

And then, as soon as the last guest was gone, and Mrs. Verral safely out of the way, this young man rose and deliberately threw himself into temptation. He knew where to find Mary, having heard his mother request her to decorate the schoolroom ready for the *tableaux vivants* to be performed there on the morrow, the twenty-fourth; and so to the schoolroom he went.

He had not seen her often, but already he told himself he loved her with an endless passion, and that he would win her for himself despite all opposition.

As he entered the room he saw her standing on a chair, trying to place a large spray of holly over a picture which hung a little above her reach.

"Allow me!" he said; and, uttering a startled cry, she turned, looked down at the fair, handsome face, and read something so new, so strange, in the bright blue eyes that her own fell, and a swift blush crimsoned her face and throat.

"Thank you, I have succeeded at last!" she said, nervously, and got down from her perch. "How is my work progressing?"

"Beautifully! You must be a real genius, Miss Gresham; but cannot I help you?"

"Oh, no! I have nearly finished now, and Mrs. Verral forbids the gentlemen to enter this room."

"Does she? Well I am the son of the house, not a visitor, so that makes a difference. I don't count. And if you knew how awfully lonely it is downstairs, how sick I am of my own society, you would not wish me to go. I am an invalid, and so must be humored."

"I was sorry to hear of your accident," she said, very gently. "Does your arm pain you much, Mr. Verral?"

"Not now, or if it does I am able to forget it. Do you know, when all those women were making such an awful fuss last night over me I only wanted you—to hear you say what now you have said. 'I am sorry.'"

"Mr. Verral!" in a startled tone. "You must not talk in that way to me. I am a poor governess!"

"I don't care what you are. I know what I think you," he answered, whilst that same light-fire in the veins of a boy leapt to fiercer life. "And I have been waiting for a chance to tell you how much I wish to be your friend, how ardently I have looked forward to this meeting!"

Poor, foolish, fluttering heart! Hungering and thirsting for love, how it throbbed in the girl's bosom, until its rapture was almost pain!

Under the influence of this new feeling her face grew very pale; even the lusty red faded from the pretty lips, and a sensation of faintness stole over her.

The young man marked her agitation with a thrill of passionate triumph; but the time was young yet to speak, and she was frightened. So his next words were more temperate, his tone less ardent.

"If it will help you any," he said, "to speak to me of your past, of the home, and the

friends I understand you have lost, do not hesitate to do so. I should be proud—or most proud and glad—to feel I had your confidence and your esteem. Won't you promise to look on me as your friend?"

She was still trembling, and her voice was hardly audible as she answered,

"I do, indeed, believe you are my friend, strange as it seems. You see, I have never known much kindness; I have never known what it is to have a home or dear ones. In all the world I stand alone."

"Not alone any more, whilst I have life and breath."

The sweet lips quivered, and the wistful, beautiful eyes mutely thanked him.

"You are very, very good. But I think, before you promise so much, I ought to tell you that there is a dark mystery surrounding me; that, for aught I know to the contrary, I may be a beggar's child, taken out of charity, educated by charity, launched into the world by charity."

The startled look he turned on her struck coldly on her heart; but in a moment he recovered his ordinary manner.

"Tell me what you mean! Tell me all, Miss Gresham?"

"The all is very little. When I was only three years old a lady took me to Miss Samborne's academy, and there left me. She stated that I was the child of some people she had known, and for whose sakes she had charged herself with my maintenance until such a time as I could earn my own livelihood. But, as I had no money, should never inherit any, as soon as I was old enough to be made useful she wished that I should help in the instruction of those younger than myself, as it was her intention, (provided I had ability sufficient), to start me in life as a governess. And after a great deal of bargaining she paid Miss Samborne a large sum of money to cover all expenses incurred up to my eighteenth birthday. She gave her name as Montpensier, and promising to call once a year to satisfy herself of my progress, she drove away, and from that day until now has neither been seen nor heard of, although Miss Samborne instituted inquiries about her."

"Upon my word," Arthur said, gaily, "your story sounds like a romance. For aught you know you may be a princess in disguise!"

"Or the child of some terrible criminal," she added, sadly. "And this very uncertainty, this awful horror of one day discovering myself to be the offspring of evil parents, weighs upon my spirits, and darkens all my life!"

"You poor girl! But I will not believe such dreadful things. I prefer to draw my own conclusions. Why, Miss Gresham, that woman's very secrecy and non-appearance incline me to believe that, for some purpose of her own, she wreathed you from your parents and most successfully hid you from them."

"You are saying this out of kindness and compassion to me."

"On my honour, no! More extraordinary things than this have happened even within my very limited experience; and, to use a hackneyed phrase, 'truth is stranger than fiction.' And now, how shall I thank you for your confidence?"

"All thanks are due to you," she answered, with lowered lids.

"If you mean that—really mean it—you will grant me one little favour. I will be moderate in my demand."

"What is it, Mr. Verral?"

"That you will let me see you sometimes—not too often, but—"

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot! If Mrs. Verral discovered our meeting she would instantly dismiss me."

"She need not know; I will be very careful. And it is hard indeed if friends may never exchange greetings! You will consent—you must!"

"Do not tempt me;" she pleaded, "do not teach me to despise your mother!" and she knew it if he urged her further she should

yield to his desire. He was already so dear to her—and she was all alone!

"I shall quote Byron to you soon," he said, gaining possession of her hands. "Why should your heart

"It's flintiness prove
On none, till it proved it to me?"

"But—but," she faltered, "I thought—I have heard that gentlemen only despise girls who meet and walk clandestinely with them?"

"You have been listening to a great deal of nonsense," severely. "It is not as though we do not know each others' antecedents, and when my mother learns all your goodness, all your graces, she will be pleased to sanction our friendship."

"Oh, no! never that. Already she regards me with suspicion and dislike."

"No, no; and even if that were so she is not the controller of my actions. Why will you be so obdurate? At least promise if by chance we meet you will not run away, or avoid me as if I had the plague?"

"I will promise so much," with a half-sad smile, and with this concession he feigned content, but inwardly he resolved to make those "chance" meetings very frequent.

"You have made me your debtor for life," he said, and longed to kiss some colour into those pure, pale cheeks, but would not frighten Mary by such violent wooing.

Just for to-day he kept strict watch and ward over himself, and when he left her consoled himself with pressing his lips to one small hand.

"She is peerless," he thought, as he went slowly and reluctantly downstairs, "and I love her! I love her! I love her! with all my soul. To think that I should be so easily bowled over—I, who have flirted with a dozen or more pretty girls, and never felt the least little bit of a heart-throb for one! There'll be a deuce of a row when the master knows I mean to marry her; but she is so fond of me she can't hold out long against us. Poor, lonely little darling! I wonder who she really is? But I don't care a fig whether she is a king's or a scavenger's daughter, so long as she remains her own sweet self."

The morning of the twenty-fourth was bright and still frosty; so at breakfast Arthur announced his intention of running over to Hallingford, the nearest town.

"My dear Arthur," remonstrated Mrs. Verral, "do you think you are wise?"

"Pon my soul, mother, I don't know," laughing, "but if you mean will the journey hurt me, I say, most emphatically, 'no!' And I want to get some things for the youngsters. Pray look on me in the light of a benevolent Santa Claus, Miss Dorniton."

"You are not venerable enough for the character. But could you not commission Mrs. Verral and I to make your purchases?"

"No; that would not do at all. I must go myself."

"I'll go with you, Arthur," Ronald said, and Arthur, who really wished, for reasons of his own, to go alone, was compelled to accept the offer with the best grace he could.

So they took train to Hallingford, and surely no young man ever hung so perplexedly about the shops as did Arthur.

He had purchased enough toys for half-a-dozen children, and still did not seem content, and when Ronald paused before a bookseller's, he said, hastily,

"Look here; the time is flying—suppose you make your purchase whilst I go over the way? I want to get something for my mother," and waiting for no remonstrance he hurried across to the jeweller's.

He wanted something for Mary, and much as he regretted it, he knew that something must not be sufficiently expensive to attract attention to the wearer.

"I want some pretty gift for a young lady; it must be good, but not showy. What would you recommend?"

"You might have a locket, sir—or, stay, if you want something really unique, this cross

would suit you. The style is so uncommon, the work so delicately lovely!" and he produced a small gold cross for Arthur's inspection.

He had not praised it too highly, for running up the centre was a spray of minute passion-flowers, wrought so perfectly that one could but wonder at the skill and ingenuity of the artist.

Arthur did not hesitate a moment.

"Thank you," he said; "I will decide upon this. And now, if you will pack it, and oblige me with pen and ink, I shall be glad."

The little packet was sealed and addressed, and Arthur was inspecting some filigree bracelets when Ronald joined him.

"What an unconscionable time you are!" said the latter. "Make haste, or we shall have the pleasure of walking home."

"I am ready now," he answered, selecting a bracelet for his mother, and some quaint charms for Lily. "I say, old man," as they turned out of the shop together, "what have you bought?"

"Books," laconically.

"Of course, idiot! But what books?"

"Old Moore's Almanac, 'Watts' Hymns,' and 'Paul and Virginia.'

Arthur burst out laughing.

"What nice, suitable gifts for this festive season! But, of course, old, boy, you have a right to be secret, if you choose, and my curiosity is rightly punished."

He was in the maddest of spirits all the way home, laughing hilariously, and talking incessantly, careless that Ronald scarcely answered his mad sallies, and seemed much preoccupied.

All that evening, too, he was the gayest of that gay party, and his heart beat fast as he thought,—

"What will she say? How will she look when she knows I have thought of her—my darling! my darling!"

Christmas morning came at last—the old, proverbial Christmas with ice and snow; and in honour of the day the children were allowed to take breakfast with Mrs. Verral, so that Mary ate hers alone.

Beside her plate, to her intense surprise, were two packets, the one small, the other of much larger dimensions; but as her eyes fell upon the smaller of the two a great wave of light and colour flooded her face.

She knew the handwriting; and, oh! what rapture it was to feel that even on such an occasion as this, when so much occupied with pleasure and his guests, he had not forgotten her.

What tears were abed upon the golden symbol! What happy, happy prayers rose from that innocent heart!

And how could she tell that before another Christmas she would curse this hour, and loathe the donor of the gift?

Then, how kind it was of Mr. Tempest so to remember her! and she touched the two beautifully-bound volumes of Rossetti's poems with loving hands. The frontispiece was a faithful picture of the "blessed Damosel," and when he bought it Roland thought the face was like Mary's.

CHAPTER III.

NEVER had such a happy day dawned for the poor little waif. She was no longer lonely and sad—no longer conscious of her meagre attire, which was all uncalculated to keep out the biting cold. She was living—moving in a dream; and when she came downstairs with the children, all ready dressed for church, one or two visitors looked at her in wonder and admiration.

What had come to the little pale governess? She was always beautiful but now, with that light in her eyes, that beautiful glow upon her cheeks, she was irresistible. Even Minnie noticed the change.

"How nice you look, Miss Gresham!" she

said. "Have you had any presents to make your Christmas happy?"

"It is a happy season, Minnie!" she answered, evasively.

"How can it be when you sit up in that stupid room all alone, and have no friends come to see you, and no pretty new things? I know I should be miserable!"

"Hush, Minnie, we are almost in church now."

The joyous service well accorded with her happy frame of mind; and where he sat Arthur could hear the sweet, clear voice joining in the old familiar hymns, which meant so much more to the girl than ever they had done before. He could watch every varying expression of that beautiful, mobile face; and once he met the grateful gaze of those luminous eyes, which drooped before the answering look in his.

He hoped she wore his gift, although he caught no gleam of gold upon the breast. He felt she would know instinctively who was the sender, and wondered how she looked, and when it was delivered into her hands. He was almost as sorry as she was when the service ended, and the ladies trooping out bore him with them to the waiting carriages.

Mrs. Verral paused in the porch, and bidding Mary lift the children up beside her settled herself comfortably in her barouche, leaving the governess to perform the homeward journey alone, and on foot.

The blood flushed Arthur's fair face as he turned to Lily.

"What a thundering shame!" he said, indignantly. "If I were my mother I would not behave in such a way to a dog."

"Poor girl," said Miss Dorniton, "it is hard to make such a distinction. I am afraid she must feel it very bitterly."

"You would not place your governess on an equality with your guests?" questioned Arthur's *vis-à-vis*, a lady of uncertain age.

"Why not, Miss Mortlock? Is not the governess usually a lady too?"

Miss Mortlock shrugged her thin shoulders contemptuously.

"I wonder if you would be quite so chivalrous if Miss Gresham were old and ugly. I really think, Mr. Arthur, I must warn Mrs. Verral of the great interest you have in her."

"Oh no, no!" cried Lily, so earnestly and anxiously that Arthur's heart warmed to her.

"Of course you would be jesting; but, with all due deference to Mrs. Verral, I am afraid she has no sense of humour, and she would not accept your words in deadly earnest, so that matters would go hardly with that poor girl."

"Of course I was joking," said the other, who, being perfectly indifferent to Mary, let her severely alone. "You are needlessly alarmed."

Meanwhile our heroine had started briskly for the Manor; but soon her pace slackened, and losing herself in her dream of happiness she progressed very slowly indeed.

She uttered a little startled cry when a voice close by said, "Miss Gresham," and lifting her eyes she saw Ronald Tempest. He had not accompanied the others to church on some plausible excuse or other; but from the first he had intended to waylay Mary, if only to wish her the compliments of the season.

"I could not bear to think of you spending all to-day alone, eating out your heart with vain and cruel longings," he said, gently; "so I ventured to meet you. You are not angry?"

"Oh no! how could I be, when you are so kind to me?"

"What has happened? You do not look nearly so sad as I feared you would, and yet your loneliness must be intensified to-day!"

"I am hardly conscious that I am lonely," gently. "I am so happy; and, Mr. Tempest, I want to thank you for your kind remembrance of me—your generous and beautiful gift. I was so far from hoping or expecting any present."

"Then it did please you to know I thought of you?" eagerly.

"Yes," she answered frankly, all unconscious of the construction he would place upon her words. It is good to find oneself kindly remembered. And I have so often wanted those very books, but they have always been beyond the limits of my purse!"

Then, as she thought of the costly volumes, with their handsome aesthetic bindings, the clear type and paper "thick as a board," her face flushed deeply. "But I am afraid I am wrong to accept them; they must have cost you so much money!"

He laughed a pleasant, musical laugh, good to hear.

"Oh, don't worry about such trifles. It is not often I play 'Santa Claus.' I leave all those little graceful acts to Arthur; they sit well upon him. And pray how do you propose spending the remainder of the day?"

"In reading, unless I am wanted downstairs and Mr. Tempest, your kindness makes me bold to ask a favour of you. If I am called down I want you not to appear to see me. I am grateful—oh, most grateful—to you for your courtesy; but indeed it only makes life here harder for me."

"I can't stay in the room and behave like a cad to you," he said, impetuously. "I should deserve to be kicked if I did!"

"But indeed—!" Mary began, when he interrupted her unceremoniously.

"If you come down that will be the signal for me to leave the room. I shall feel like a cur sneaking away in that fashion! But I cannot remain and witness the shameful treatment you bear so meekly and uncomplainingly. I wish I had a mother! She should rescue you from this drudgery and harsh treatment!"

"She might share Mrs. Verral's prejudice against me."

"If she did I'd disown her!"

Mary laughed outright, and the young man looked at her with pleased eyes.

"I believe you are happy to-day!" he said, with conviction. "And I shall have less compunction in leaving you when we reach home."

"You must leave me now, if you please. We are within sight of the Manor."

"But I hate to do it!" he answered, flushing uneasily. It has such a cowardly, clandestine appearance! It looks as though we are ashamed to be seen together."

"I am not ashamed but afraid to be seen with you, Mr. Tempest. It is for my own sake I now ask you to say good-bye."

"Then, however reluctantly, I will obey. Good-bye, Miss Gresham. All happy thoughts go with you!"

He pressed her hand gently, and the next moment she found herself alone.

All the long afternoon she spent in alternately reading and dreaming.

Now and again faint sounds of merriment came borne to her where she sat; but she was not envious of the mirth and jollity, being so absorbed in the contemplation of her own happiness.

A neat maid brought her a dainty tea, and looking with that pity the season begets upon the young governess, said,—

"It's hard for you, miss, I must say. Down in the servants' hall we're having as good times as the folks upstairs; and I do say the mistress ought to ask you to join 'em."

"I am happier by myself, Jane."

"Well, that's queer taste!"

But as she went downstairs she thought,—

"I believe, for all her quiet ways, Miss Gresham's got a beau. I quite forgot them two parcels she got this morning. Depend on it, she's happy enough thinking over them."

The shadows filled the room, but Mary did not light the lamp.

It was pleasant to watch the glowing embers, and to see pictures there—pictures of a happy future, of a young and loyal lover, of herself no longer lonely and neglected.

Oh, yes; she was quite content.

In the drawing room the ladies were languidly playing fashionable games, pending

the arrival of the gentlemen; and Arthur, taking advantage of the time, stole out of the room upstairs to where Mary was sitting.

"Hush!" he said, warningly, as he entered. "I have only a few minutes to spare; but I could not let the day go by without seeing you alone."

She had risen trembling and confused; and now he advanced with outstretched hand, into which she laid her little slender fingers.

Retaing possession of them, the young man said,—

"Let me look at you, Mary. You little witch! what have you done to yourself? You are lovelier than ever—no, do not turn away! After a fast a man hungers, and it seems ages since we stood together here! Mary, why don't you wear my gift?"

At that she flushed more rosily than before.

"It is too costly for me, Mr. Verral."

"No, no. And don't you know how glad I should be to learn it had found favour in your sight—that when you looked at it you would remember the giver, whose whole heart went with the gift?" And now he had thrown his arm about her, and was holding her fast whilst he kissed the sweet lips once.

"Mr. Verral! What have you done? Oh! let me go!"

"Call me Arthur—tell me you love me, and I will do anything you ask! You do love me, darling—is it not so?"

Unschoolled in any wiles, untutored to hide her passion, full of adoring gratitude to this man, who had come to feed her hungry heart, she turned to him with a pathetic gesture.

"Arthur, I love you! I love you!" and shivered with the force of this new emotion.

He kissed her again and again; he called her by every fond, endearing name in the lover's vocabulary. And when further stay was dangerous he tore himself reluctantly away, and went downstairs with a very thoughtful face.

He had not meant to be so precipitate, but Mary's beauty had been all too great for his self-control, and now he found himself pledged to her by every vow, and every instinct of honour.

"There will be a row when all is known," he thought. "But I'll be true to her in spite of all opposition. I could not bear my life now without her!"

He was so quiet all that night that Ronald rallied him upon his gravity, and Lily watched him with anxious eyes.

He was thinking how to break the news of his engagement to Mrs. Verral, and how soon it would be necessary to do so; but he could arrive at no definite decision, and retired at last in a perplexed and uneasy frame of mind only to fall into a troubled sleep.

But he woke in the morning blithe as a lark, and having contrived to slip a note under the schoolroom door, went down to breakfast with the air of a man who has done his duty.

The note was short and unsigned—unaddressed.

"Go to Hallingford by the twelve train. Will join you there."

And as Mary read it her face grew troubled, and a vague sense of shame possessed her.

Much as she loved him, fully as she trusted him, her heart recoiled from concealment and deceit, even for his sake.

And in some way it seemed to her she would be degraded in her own eyes and his if she consented to stolen meetings and clandestine interviews.

But she was slave to his will, and she told herself that perhaps Arthur wished to consult her upon the ways and means for winning Mrs. Verral to their side.

Her time was at her own disposal—at least, for this one day, and long before twelve o'clock came she had determined to go Hallingford.

She dressed herself with the utmost care, and remembering Arthur's wish, fastened his gift to a narrow band of velvet, and wore it about her throat.

There were very few passengers to the sleepy town, and on her arrival the platform was all but deserted.

Arthur was waiting for her, his fair, handsome face bright with happiness and love. It was easy to see his conscience was at rest.

"How good of you to come, darling!" he said. "I was half afraid at the last you would fail me. Now, to reward you, I am going to make this day the happiest you have known."

"Where are we going?" she asked, as he hurried her towards a cab.

"To a dear, old-fashioned inn just outside the town, where I have ordered luncheon for two. You see, sweetheart, I have so much to say to you, and we could not hope for an uninterrupted interview at home!"

"No," she said, flushing deeply; "and this air of mystery and deceit is painful to me. Arthur, when will you tell Mrs. Verral?"

He looked vexed a moment, then his face cleared up again as he answered, gently.—

"Very soon, my darling, but at present it is not politic. Can't you trust me fully, Mary?"

"You know that I can! But, oh! if she should discover our secret, and how we have deceived her, she will never forgive us."

He thought it very probable she never would under any circumstances; but he did not say so. He only put his arm about the slender waist and spoke persuasively.

"Sweetheart, I feel I am asking a great deal of you, but I have such faith in your love for me that I am not afraid you will disappoint me. Just now it would be madness to divulge anything. She is so set upon my marriage with Lily Dorton; and beside that, to tell the truth, she has some claim to my consideration. It was only last month she settled all claims against me at Cambridge. I had been more extravagant than I ought; but now—having you to think of, I shall be careful. I mean to work like the proverbial black when I go up again, and then, when she is most pleased at my application and success, I shall tell her the whole story!"

"But," said Mary in dismay, "that will be three long months. How shall I bear to meet her daily, knowing how I am deceiving her?"

"Oh!" airily; "you will get used to that sort of thing; and it is a very innocent deception. Darling, it is for my sake!"

He could not have used a better plea.

"It is against my conscience," she said, almost with a sob, "but I cannot act in opposition to your will. Oh, Arthur, how I wish for your sake I were wealthy and well-born!"

"Of course that would smooth matters," he answered, cheerfully; "but I, for one, don't intend looking on the dark side of things. Here is our inn, Mary, and now for the rest of the day let me see your dear face as I saw it last night, transfigured with love and happiness."

And although for the moment her heart was heavy she smiled up into the handsome face and sunny eyes.

The comfortable landlady met them in the porch of the picturesque inn, beautiful even in its winter garb; and led the way to a cosy room, where quite an epicurean repast was served.

Oh, that happy, happy time! In the day when she should become a wanderer and an outcast, the thought of it would make her sick and blind. But no foreboding of woe was on her then. Under the influence of Arthur's love, and Arthur's smile, she forgot all but her own great blessings; and was so bright, so winsome, that the young fellow was more than ever infatuated with her.

What dreams they dreamed! What plans they planned, never alas! to be carried out! What pathetic faith she had in him, and how strong he then believed his love! Alas for the maid,

"If you live you must love, if you love despair," only as yet Mary would not believe this, even if one came from the dead to warn her.

The hours flew all too fast. It was time to return homewards before they were weary of each other, or aware how quickly the moments flew. All their plans for future meetings were now complete, and when they reached the little home station there was nothing further to say than good-bye. Only Arthur insisted upon walking a little way with Mary; then pausing in a secluded part of the road he took her in his arms, and kissed her passionately again and again.

"Oh, my darling, how hard it is to part!" And her own heart echoed his words. "Have you been happy to-day? Have you had anything left to desire?"

"Happy! Oh, Arthur, for the first time in my life I have lived; before I but existed. Good-night, good-night! dear heart! Heaven bless you for your love and goodness to me!"

Then he let her go, her last words ringing in his ears, her last smile lingering with him yet.

Mary was fortunate enough to enter the house unobserved, and, hurrying to her room, sat down upon her bed and gave herself up wholly to her dream of love. But to Arthur's annoyance, when he reached his own apartment, he found Ronald there, looking very fierce and zealous.

"Arthur," he said, abruptly, "I am not given to beating about the bush, so I may as well tell you I know who was your companion at Hellingford. I saw you both on the platform just now, and took a nearer cut home, because I did not wish even to seem to intrude. But I ask you, are you playing a manly part towards that poor girl?"

"I'll knock the fellow over who denies it," savagely. "Look here, Ronald, I won't suffer any interference from you; let my affairs alone, or we shall quarrel. What is it to you if Miss Gresham was my companion?"

CHAPTER IV.

"THIS, that I will not stand by and see an orphaned, friendless girl made the sport for your idle moments. As for making her the subject of a vulgar brawl, I would scorn to do it."

"Listen a moment," Arthur said, more temperately; "my heart aches to think of her loneliness, and her sad little face haunted me. I thought I would give her an unexpected pleasure. Surely no reasonable soul could object to that?"

"Not even your mother, or Miss Dornon?"

"The former has no right of control over me; the latter does not yet claim me as her own particular property. So I say again, I shall act as I please with regard to Miss Gresham."

"And I say you shall not," in a white heat. "I'll stand between you; you shall not break her heart and spoil her life."

"I don't intend to," coolly. "I mean to marry her if she will have me."

"What!"

"Oh, you're not obliged to believe me unless you choose; but I am in earnest, I can assure you."

"Does Mrs. Verral know this?" in a hard voice.

"Not at present. You don't suppose I am going to speak before I am sure of winning Mary!"

"If you love her honourably I have no more to say; if you fail her, you may know what to expect," and the honest face looked quite aged and worn in the uncertain light. "I could have wished her to choose one less unstable and variable than yourself; but you have a way that wins upon women."

"Upon my soul, I believe you love Miss Gresham yourself!"

"I do," coolly, "and until she decides between us I warn you I shall try to win her for myself."

"Does Miss Gresham know of your pretensions?" haughtily.

"No; I am not such a fool as to injure my cause by any premature declaration," and he walked out of the room, leaving Arthur with a smile on his face.

He could afford to be complacent, having won the prize his cousin so coveted; and if anything had been wanting to give completion to his love, to lend zest to his wooing, it was just the knowledge that he had a rival, and Ronald, with his unremembered estate and fine income was a formidable one.

He was very careful in his conduct with regard to Mary. Astute and suspicious as Mrs. Verral was, she never dreamed of those secret meetings, the vows exchanged, the love which grew with each day. And if Miss Gresham was more than ever anxious to please, more than ever attentive to her duties, she never thought of inquiring or looking for the cause. And thus things were on the last day of Arthur's stay, when he had an audience with his mother.

"Arthur," she said, "you know my wishes concerning you and Lily. What are you going to do?"

"What is it you wish?" he asked, his face clouding suddenly.

"That when you leave here Lily shall be your affianced wife."

"What! Do you mean I am to pop the question to day?"

"If you choose to put it so inelegantly, yes. Where is the use of delay?"

"Oh, hang it, mother, I can't! Let things stand over until I come home again!"

"Which will not be until June. You apparently forget you spend your Easter vacation abroad. It is not likely a girl of spirit will wait for such a laggard in love as you."

He smiled significantly.

"Look here, mother, I don't want to vex you; and you, on your part, must not harass me into the thing. I promise you I'll say something pretty to little Lil, that will keep her contented until June."

He looked so handsome, standing there with his head well thrown back, a half-insolent, half-mocking smile upon his lips, that, with a sigh, Mrs. Verral said, —

"I suppose I must be content; but I confess I am disappointed. I really do not see why you should so strongly object to an engagement. You are twenty-three now!"

"That is a shocking age," he answered, laughing. "I ought to feel like a Methuselah, whereas I don't believe I've seen half my wild oats yet. But you may rest satisfied, mother, that I will do my best to please you," and he then went away to keep his tryst with Mary.

"Darling!" he said, catching her close, "how pale you are! And you have been crying! I declare you look as woe-begone as though you were losing your whole world!"

"And am I not? Are you not my world?" she asked, tremulously, and clung to him in a passion of sorrow.

Her simple faith, her adoring love, were as incense to his vanity. Ah! no one would ever love him so well as did this grey-eyed girl, to whom one day he would prove a traitor and a rogue; and yet whom, through all his weakness, his sin against her, his public renunciation of her, he would still love.

"I have not much time to spare, sweet-heart, so you must pay the greatest attention to my last instructions. You must not flirt with Ronald. He loves you. Did not you know?" as the girl gave a startled exclamation. "I am a jealous fellow, and I will not share your love, your favours, with another!"

"Arthur, am I not wholly yours?"

"I hope so—I know so. But you are young. Ronald is rich, and free to please himself, and he isn't bad-looking. Well, having disposed of that subject I will just speak briefly about our letters. We will write twice a week, you on Saturdays and Wednesdays, I on Sundays and Thursdays; and you will remember always to call at the post-office for yours."

"Yes, I will remember. But, oh, Arthur,

how happy I should be if there were no need for deosai!"

"Now, little woman, that is a tabooed subject, and you must notadden our last minutes with such thoughts. See, the time for parting has already come. Oh! my love, how shall I bear to let you go?"

How white was the upturned, quivering face! What a passion of pain and love looked forth from the deep, dark eyes! Even he, that careless, selfish young fellow, was shaken with this hour's agony; and perhaps just now he thought more of her than of himself.

"You will be so lonely, poor heart!" he said, smoothing the beautiful hair with tender hands. "I shall have many friends to console me for my loss—no, not console, but help me to bear it, and make the time of separation seem shorter; but you, poor little sweetheart, will be all alone!"

"Oh, don't!" she moaned, "I cannot bear it! Arthur, Arthur, I wish you were less dear to me! It would kill me now to lose you!"

"There is small fear of that. I can have no thoughts for other women, having known you."

"But—but sometimes death steps between those who love each other as we do."

"You shall not talk in such a way. You will send me on my journey with all sorts of forebodings. Come, darling, be brave! It is only for six months, and then we will be together always."

"You will tell her then?"

"Yes, yes, sweetheart. Now, kiss me good-bye—ones more!"

Then came the sound of loving, whispered words, strained sighs, of quick-drawn, shuddering breaths. Then the echo of hastily-retreating steps, and a woman's voice that wailed good-bye. And when she could see him no longer Mary fell on her knees, praying passionately, "Oh, dear Heaven, bring him back to me!" not knowing them what a sorry boon she prayed for.

To Lily, Arthur said, pensively, that the thoughts of leaving the pleasant home circle, even for the delights of Cambridge life, was bitter to him. He asked her to remember him kindly when he was gone, and concluded with the words, —

"When I return in June I hope to find you here; I shall then have something to say to you which I now lack courage to tell."

And how could the poor girl guess that he was referring to a hope he nourished that she would intercede for him with his mother when she learned of his engagement. Oh! what a tangled web he was weaving, only in the end to be caught and crushed in it. Poor, weak, vacillating Arthur!

After his departure the weeks and months passed more swiftly than Mary had dared to hope.

She had so many duties to occupy her time, and there were Arthur's letters to cheer her, so that the hours did not hang heavily upon her.

She missed Ronald's cheerful presence, but was glad that he had left the Manor, because he had openly sought her, woeing her in a plain and honest fashion, which touched her heart to pity for him.

"Why do you send me away?" he asked. "Is it because of Arthur?"

She flushed crimson, but answered gently, —

"You have no right to ask me such a question!" but Ronald knew all too well he had guessed the truth.

"You have already answered me. Rest assured, Mary, your secret is safe with me; but, oh, Heaven! if only you had loved me I would have made you happy," and she wondered at the deep compassion in his eyes.

"I am going away to-morrow," he said, the next moment, in quite a matter-of-fact tone, "so will leave you my address. If there is ever anything great or small I can do for you you may command me," and, perhaps because he could not say more, he turned away with no other leave-taking.

He went straight to his aunt.

"Aunt, I am leaving you to-morrow; I have already stayed an unconscionable time."

"You are always very welcome, Ronald; but for your own sake I should advise your departure for a little while. I have noticed you have paid far greater attention than is wise or well to Miss Gresham."

"It is of her I came to speak; I may as well confess the truth. I come now from an interview with Miss Gresham, in which she distinctly and emphatically refused to become my wife!"

"A very sensible decision too, my dear Ronald. You must have been mad—"

"To suppose such a girl could love a fellow like me?" he said, wilfully misconstruing her words. "Perhaps I was. Well, Aunt, I want you, for my sake, to be a good friend to her. She is so young and lovely to be all alone in the world."

"I do not think I have ever treated Miss Gresham harshly, but I will promise what you ask, because the girl has proved herself modest and unassuming," and she really meant to keep her word.

As for Ronald, when he had left the house behind, he broke into a fit of laughter, despite his heavy disappointment and grief.

"Oh! if she only knew the reason for Mary's conduct, what ruinations there would be!" he said, aloud; and then grew grave, remembering all the weakness and moral cowardice of his cousin.

June came at last—June with its wealth of roses, its countless sweet scents and sounds, and Mary's heart was light as a feather.

In a little while all would be well. Arthur would be with her, and of late Mrs. Verral had been so considerate that Mary hoped she would be easily reconciled to her engagement.

Then there came a letter from Arthur, which made her tremble and grow cold, and yet which thrilled her through with a sudden sense of his great love.

"My queen," he wrote, "if you think, that after such a long absence, I shall be content to meet you only in the bosom of my family, you little know what manner of man you have chosen."

"I am not expected at home until the eighteenth, but I really leave here on the ninth, and am going down to Portdown, a little sea-coast place in the west, where you must join me on the twelfth."

"Yes, Mary, I mean this in sober earnest. I know that until we are man and wife my mother will never receive you as her daughter; but, when once the deed is done, she will be powerless to help herself."

"And I am horribly afraid that while I wait and wait, trying to screw my courage up to the sticking point, some other fellow will step in and win you. I shall never feel safe, so I have determined to get a special license, and as soon as you can get down here we will be married."

"Oh, yes, I know the thousand and one objections you will raise, the frightened look in your dear eyes, and how your poor little heart will throb—not altogether with pain I hope. But, Mary, darling Mary! I know my own special weakness, as you can never know it, my own frailty of will, and horror of all unpleasant things; and if you would save me from myself, if you would have me in anything worthy, in anything good, you must come to me now."

"I ask it for my own sake—mine only. Write me only one word, but let it be 'yes.' I will forward all necessary funds, and you can easily get a holiday."

"You may tell the truth as to your destination, but must not say one word of me until I bid you. Oh! my little sweetheart, can you have the heart to refuse? Think of six long days spent together!"

And then followed a great deal more in the same strain.

Long did the girl bathe with herself; but is it any wonder that in the end love conquered?

And with many misgivings she wrote, consenting to his prayer.

Then she went to Mrs. Verral, and begged for leave of absence. The lady was in a most gracious mood.

"Certainly, Miss Gresham, you may go. You have worked well, and have had no holiday since you came. Where do you intend going?"

"To Portdown, madam."

"You have friends there, I presume?"

"I have a friend there," and the pale face flushed so hotly it was well Mrs. Verral was intent upon some intricate lace work.

"I hope you will spend an agreeable week," and that terminated the interview.

How the poor girl passed the intervening days she could not tell. She was in a fever of apprehension, lest at the last all would be discovered—lest some chance look or word would reveal the truth to Mrs. Verral, and bring calamity to Arthur and herself.

But at last the morning of the twelfth came, and before ten o'clock Mary was very far on her journey, speeding towards lover and happiness.

She was in a terribly excited state—her eyes burned, and her head throbbed and ached; her heart beat so madly that she thought her fellow-passengers must hear, and guess on what errand she was bent.

And it was exquisite relief to her when they steamed into the little station, and she caught sight of Arthur, radiant and triumphant.

He hurried to meet her.

"My darling! my darling!" he whispered, as he took her little hand in his. "I was afraid that at the last you would fail me!"

"Oh! better for her, far, far better had she indeed done so!"

"I had promised you," she said, simply. "And now, Arthur, where are you taking me?"

"To church, of course! Your luggage can be sent up to the Royal. Come, sweetheart, that will soon be wife. Oh! Mary, Mary! how shall I ever thank you—love you enough?"

"I have done nothing that calls for thanks. You are giving me everything, and I bring you nothing!"

"You bring your own dear self. What more can a man desire?"

"I am the beggar-maid, and you King Cophetua. Oh, Arthur! how I will strive to make you happy! Heaven helping me, you shall never have cause to regret this sacrifice for my poor sake!"

And with those words she entered the church with him, and saw like one in a dream the white-robed clergyman awaiting them—knew in the same vague way that Arthur had taken her by the hand, and led her to the altar.

Her heart beat so heavily she was like to faint, but when, kneeling together, she heard the solemn injunctions and exhortations, all the tumult and confusion fell from her like a garment; and all her soul rose up in passionate prayer for help to be a perfect wife—true in thought and feeling to this man to whom she now plighted her troth.

Alas, alas! poor child! How often in the days that followed would she look on this hour as the most evil and bitter in all her cruel life!

But no shadow was on her happiness as she went into the sunshine with her handsome young bridegroom, who looked so ridiculously proud and glad that passers-by turned to smile upon him, guessing all the truth.

They went at once to the Royal Hotel, where Arthur proudly introduced his bride to the obsequious landlord, and there followed six such happy days as are not often given mortals to know.

One morning, as they passed out of the hotel, a lady paused to look at them, and meeting the landlord in the entrance, said,—

"What a handsome young couple, Mr. Cullam! Are they brother and sister?"

"Oh, no, my lady!" answered Cullam, bowing profoundly. "They are bride and bride-

groom. The gentleman is Mr. Arthur Verral, and the marriage was quite a romantic one."

But the Countess Loria's interest was already exhausted, and languidly thanking Mr. Cullam for his information, she went on to her own apartments, thinking that Mary's face looked very familiar, and wondering where she had seen it.

On the morning of the eighteenth Mary returned to the Manor alone, Arthur following in the evening.

To her bitter disappointment he utterly refused to acknowledge their marriage, because, "for a little while, it was politic to keep the secret inviolate!"

CHAPTER V.

THEN followed a bitter time for Mary—a time of cruel suspense and fear—a gradual awakening to the weakness of her husband's nature. She never doubted his love, for indeed his passion for her was intense and lasting; but slowly, slowly it was borne upon her that in all things she must be the guide and director.

She was so weary of an unequal battle with the world that she longed to rest her weakness upon another's strength; and lo! she found she had leaned upon a reed. But she loved him still, in spite of all, with a love that had something pitifully maternal in it, and she bore with all his complainings about the unsweariness of his fate with a patience that was almost sublime.

Think of that poor girl's life, then—the least respected in the household, toiling hard, suffering many an indignity from servants as well as mistress, she who should have been the loved and honoured wife and daughter; seeing her husband flaunting it with the best, hearing his name coupled with that of Miss Dornton, knowing that when she sat lonely and sad in the solitary schoolroom he was leaning over Lily's chair, singing to her playing, looking into her pretty eyes with admiration in his own. Oh! it was hard, it was hard!

"He, mixing with his proper sphere
She finds the baseness of her lot;
Half jealous of she knows not what,
And envying all who meet him there."

In July Mrs. Verral announced her intention of "doing the Rhine" in company with the Dorntons and some other friends, and of course Arthur was to accompany them. His mother hoped in this trip to bring matters to a climax with Lily and her son, and it was Mary's anguish to know this.

"Arthur," she said, when they met the night before his departure, "how long is this to go on? My life is a misery to me!"

"Oh, now Mary, it isn't like you to complain. You must be patient, don't you see? I am altogether yours, and nothing can set aside the fact that you are my wife. I thank Heaven for that!"

"But Arthur, think of the misery of it all! Is it not cruel that I, your wife, must steal out to meet you as though it were a sin to do so—that I must be a living lie? a daily cheat? Oh, Arthur! oh, my husband! let us brave the worst! It cannot be very hard while we have each other."

"How stupidly you talk," he retorted, so angrily that she shrank back in dismay. "We could not live on bread and water; we might even think ourselves lucky to get that sumptuous diet. I must take my own time to tell the master, and if you make any premature disclosure I warn you it will be worse for us."

"I shall not betray you," she said, so coldly, that he was startled, "and I think I shall never press you upon this subject again."

Then she turned as if to go, but he held her fast.

"Mary, sweetheart, wife; you shall not leave me in anger. My darling, just in this one thing you must let me use my own discretion. Surely I know my mother best!"

"Yes, I grant that; but you promised when your college career was ended this deceit should end too. You have not kept your vow, Arthur, Arthur!" beginning to tremble, "if ever you loved me, if indeed I am dear to you, give me my rightful place in the world. I am not afraid of poverty. I will work unceasingly for you; but—"

"But, my dear girl, you don't understand all you are promising, all you are urging upon me. It would be death to all my prospects to proclaim the truth just now."

"It is death to our happiness to hold your peace; it is cruel and unmanly to encourage any hope Miss Dornon may have."

"Upon my soul, Mary, you are jealous!" he said, airily. "What a little goose you are! If I had not loved you first and best, should I have made you my wife? Little woman, you are fractious to-night."

She made no answer, being far too wounded for speech to be easy; only the look she turned upon him lingered with him many a day.

"Poor little girl! poor little girl!" he said, soothingly, and kissed the beautiful mouth, which, for the first time since he confessed his love, did not respond to his caress. "It is hard for you, but it won't be for long; and as you love me, Mary, you will remember my commands. I shall write to you very often, and when I come back we will discuss the best way of bringing about our disclosure. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Then kiss me, and be good. It is not like you to worry a fellow."

"I will never trouble you again," proudly. "You shall choose your own time; but, oh! I think if I had a father or brother to defend my rights you would treat me less cavalierly."

"Mary, you don't know what you are saying. You imply I am cruel and false to you, when, as Heaven is my witness, I love you with all my soul. Don't you believe that, wife of mine?"

"Oh! yes, I believe you *love* me."

"Well, feeling assured of that, you surely might trust me to act honestly towards you; and, for Heaven's sake, let us part friends. Who knows whether we may meet again? Before the three months have gone one of us may be dead."

With swift compunction she turned, threw her arms about his neck, caught him close to her wounded heart, kissing him wildly, whilst the tears flowed fast down her cheeks.

"Arthur! Arthur! do not speak of death. I was hard to you, harder than I should have been; but I love you, oh! dear husband, I love you! and I will say no harsh word to spoil your coming enjoyment."

"It will not be enjoyment without you."

And so with kisses and tender words they parted; he to fill those three months with every conceivable pleasure; she to spend the dreary, unsatisfactory days in weary labour, to eat out her heart with fruitless longings for the sound of his voice and the touch of his hand.

In September Mrs. Verral returned to the Manor, irritable and exacting, for Arthur had not proved amenable; and Lily was not so easily pacified as once she was.

She had gone home to her own people, and after two days spent with his family Arthur started for Scotland, where he intended having good sport.

So it was, from time to time only, that Mary saw her husband; and then their interviews were brief and unsatisfactory.

He was almost always from home, fearing, in his cowardly soul, that any prolonged sojourn there might rouse Mrs. Verral's suspicions.

Christmas again drew near, and the wretched young wife thought miserably of the past—that previous Christmas Day when she had thought herself blessed beyond her deserts.

Mrs. Verral had issued numerous invitations, and Mary's services were in great re-

quisition, Mrs. Verral herself being a very indifferent correspondent.

"Here is one I wish you to answer without delay," she said, handing Mary a daintily perfumed note. "You will say that I shall be most happy to receive Mrs. Dalmaine's friend. But if you read it you will see better what you have to do."

So Mary took the note and read:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I should be most happy to accept your invite, but I have a friend staying with me whom I could not possibly neglect, because she has great influence abroad, and I am anxious she should use it behalf of my poor boy. She is very beautiful and talented, confesses to forty years, although I think she is nearer fifty. If you could accommodate her without any inconvenience to yourself I should be glad, as, from experience, I know how pleasant life is at the Manor. I am afraid you will think I am trying to impose on your good nature, but really, I should like you to meet my friend. She is the rich widow of Count Loria, (an old Italian nobleman), and is very fascinating. Hoping for an early reply,—I remain, dear friend, yours affectionately,

"LOUISE DALMAINE."

Now, Mrs. Verral worshipped a title, and Mary knew very well what sort of answer she was expected to send, and wrote accordingly, and then she began to wonder what this Christmas would bring her.

Ronald was not coming. She would miss his friendly face and little kindly attentions. Arthur had sent a very short and unsatisfactory letter, saying he hoped to be at the Manor on Christmas Eve, and with that she was forced to be content.

In the three days preceding Christmay Day Mary was too busy to have time for much thought; and she was glad it should be so, for she wished to forget, as far as possible, her most unhappy lot.

On the morning of the twenty-third Mrs. Dalmaine and the Countess arrived, but Mary did not see either lady; only she heard that the latter lady was still very beautiful, and so haughty that the maids were afraid of her.

In the evening Arthur arrived, and, was it not cruel, his young wife dare not run to meet him; that her only glimpse of him should be from the schoolroom window as he passed into the house, laughing gaily with his companions?

The poor girl flung out her arms. "Oh, Heaven! help me! I cannot bear it!" she moaned, and sank shuddering to the ground.

She did not meet him that evening; in fact, he was far too wise to make any attempt to see her, with the servants scudding to and fro, up and down the stairs and galleries.

His mother had commissioned him to take the stranger in to dinner, and he found himself attached to a lady of uncertain age, but still very handsome and magnificently dressed, although she was too liberal in the display of her white neck and arms.

"Your face is familiar to me!" she said, looking at the young man with a dazzling smile.

"Have we not met before?"

He hastened to assure her to the contrary.

"Had I been so fortunate as to meet you at any time," he said gallantly, "I could not have forgotten such grace and beauty!"

"Ah, naughty boy, you have already learned how to flatter!" she exclaimed, tapping him lightly on the arm with her fan; "but I am confident, quite confident, that we are not altogether strangers!"

Despite her foreign name and appearance she spoke without the slightest accent, and had none of those little gestures peculiar to foreign women; and Arthur found himself wondering who and what she was. She had a large experience of men and their ways, a knowledge of most civilised countries, and proved herself such an amusing partner that Arthur almost forgot his pale young wife sitting in dreary solitude, with no companions but her own sad thoughts. But, as he retired to his room that

night, a feeling of shame and compassion came over him.

"Poor darling, she deserves a better fellow!" he thought. "I am such a weak, vacillating wretch; but when all these folks are gone I will try to pluck up courage to confess my sins to the master. And, meanwhile, I must see Mary in the morning."

Bat the morning gave him no chance, and the afternoon wore away in nonsense and badinage until, indeed, the dusk was falling. Then, as he was crossing the hall, he came full tilt upon Mary.

"My dear," he said hurriedly, but she drew back.

"Don't speak to me *now*," she whispered,

"there are others near;" and then she fled upstairs, her heart full of sick scorn for this man she called husband—but still she loved him.

In her own room she crouched, praying for help and strength, crying in her sad heart that the world was against her, and that death only could release her from misery and humiliation. And breaking in upon her anguished prayers and bitter pains came a maid's voice, requesting her presence in the drawing room. There was no lady present who felt herself equal to accompanying the singers, Lily Dornon being absent. So the governess rose, and smoothing her hair, straightening the crumpled folds of her dress, went downstairs. Only one woman in that room noticed her, and that was the Countess Loria. As Mary entered her face flushed, her black eyes gleamed with sudden recollection, but she was too much a woman of the world to speak then.

She waited until a young lady, who was warbling an Italian bravura in a most excruciating style before she turned to her hostess and begged her to walk in the conservatory with her, pleading as her excuse that the room was hot. Mrs. Verral, flattered by such marked partiality, agreed only too readily; and together the two strolled into the beautiful houses. Then, after duly admiring the plants and flowers, the Countess turned to her companion.

"Dear Mrs. Verral, what a singularly lovely girl your governess is! I wonder you are not afraid to have her here, where such a susceptible young fellow as your son is may meet her daily?"

"Arthur is too proud ever to make a mésalliance."

The Countess smiled peculiarly, but contented herself with asking—

"What is the lady's name?"

"Miss Gresham—Mary Gresham."

"The name has a familiar sound to me. Do not consider me impudent, but I should very much like to know from what place she came, and who recommended her?"

Mrs. Verral would be glad to give her guest any information in her power. She had engaged Miss Gresham solely on the recommendation of her governess, Miss Samborne, who had told her that everything connected with her birth was a profound mystery."

The Countess's dark eyes flashed triumphantly.

"Then, for aught madam knew, she was a foundling, a waif. Ah! surely madam did not exercise her usual discretion when she engaged Miss Gresham as governess to her little innocent children. What was 'bred in the bone' would come out in the flesh,' and doubtless Miss Gresham was not so good as she ought to be."

"What did the Countess mean," questioned Mrs. Verral, in an alarmed way. "The young lady in question had always given her satisfaction."

"I am sorry I spoke," said the other, "as your governess seems to be such a favourite with you. But for your own sake you should know the truth. Where was Miss Gresham from June the twelfth until the eighteenth?"

"At Portdown, a little place on the west coast."

"Then it would be difficult for her to prove an alibi. I was staying at the Royal then,

and Miss Gresham was there too in the character of bride, your son passing as bridegroom."

"What?" cried Mrs. Verral, forgetful of all forms of etiquette. "My dear Countess, you must be mistaken. Arthur has never seemed so much as to notice her, which I thought wonderful, as he is susceptible to beauty, and Mary Gresham is undeniably a lovely girl."

"I am quite sure I am not mistaken. In fact, I was so much struck with the appearance of the young people that I questioned the landlord concerning them. He told me they were bride and bridegroom—Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Verral."

"Arthur would never be so mad!" cried his mother. "He knows what such a *mésalliance* would mean for him."

"That being the case, what conclusions can you draw?"

"Oh, don't!" pleaded Mrs. Verral, weakly. "She is so young, and he is my son. I would be glad to think you are mistaken. But if not, why, of course, she must go. Come back with me, and I will sift the matter to the bottom."

"What, in front of them all?" questioned the Countess, somewhat staggered by the other's energetic measures.

"Why not?" retorted Mrs. Verral. "If what you say is true that girl leaves here tonight. My roof shall not shelter her another hour."

So together they went back to the brilliant drawing-room, where Mary was playing some sweet, sad music, conscious all the while that Arthur was carrying on a very brisk flirtation with a young miss; and, pausing in the centre of the room, Mrs. Verral said, sternly, "Miss Gresham!"

Something in her tone struck a chill to the poor girl's heart. She rose, trembling in every limb, and, with one hand resting on the piano, turned her pale and frightened face upon her employer, conscious—oh! so cruelly conscious—of the wondering faces and pitiless eyes bent upon her.

"I want you to tell me where you spent your holiday last June?"

Like one in a dream she saw the wonder deepen in those watchful faces. She saw Arthur start and tremble, and knew in that moment that the worst had come.

"I stayed at Portdown, Mrs. Verral."

Was that her own voice speaking? How far away it sounded! What a terrible mist was before her eyes?

"And may I ask who was your companion?"

She shot one swift, entreating glance at Arthur, but he would not meet her eyes. He bent his own persistently upon the ground.

"Madam, I will tell you another time—not here or now."

"I request you to tell me the whole truth without delay. I have learned from reliable sources that you posed at Portdown as my son's wife." Is that true?"

"Mother!" cried Arthur, "you have no right to insult Miss Gresham!"

"Be quiet, Arthur. I am anxious only to know the truth, to vindicate this young person, if vindication is possible. Kindly tell me, Miss Gresham, if Mr. Verral was your companion?"

She glanced once again appealingly towards him, but he was dumb. Then, in her desperation, she said,—

"It is quite true."

"Then I must beg of you to leave the house at once!"

"Stay, madam, you do not understand! I am not the vile creature you would willingly believe me, but the lawful wife of Mr. Arthur Verral!"

CHAPTER VI.

HAD a bomb fallen in the midst of that select company it could not have been more completely startled. As for Arthur, he stood guilty and afraid, knowing well what would

be the cost of his love. For the moment he almost hated Mary.

"If this is true, you are no longer a son of mine!" cried Mrs. Verral, fiercely. "Take your nameless wife, and go! If it is false, deny it now—to-morrow will be too late?"

His face was white and drawn, his lips so stiff, that, although he moistened them, he could frame no word. The terrible temptation upon him then held him silent, and scarcely conscious of what was passing around him. Only he knew that Mary crossed the room, and he heard her say, in a voice that sounded very far away,—

"Arthur, you will not shame me before these people? Tell them I am your lawful, loving wife! Oh! why are you silent? Why do you allow me for one moment to rest under this stigma?"

"Speak, Arthur," said Mrs. Verral, sternly. "Is this woman's story true?"

And then—oh! the shame and horror of it—he lifted his head; and, shaking off the gentle hand that held him, muttered,—

"It is false. I would have spared her if I could."

Then rose such a clamour of voices that one might well be deafened, voices that spoke scornfully of and to that poor child standing alone and friendless in the centre of the room, wholly incapable of motion, her chin dropped on her breast, her eyes wide with horror, and her arms hung slackly by her sides—such a sad picture, that one young girl broke into passionate sobs of pity.

Mrs. Verral advanced.

"Go!" she said. "You shall not remain under this roof another hour, you shameless, abandoned woman!"

But Mary did not stir; she did not even seem to hear, and the other grasping her by the arm, shook her violently.

"What is it?" she gasped, in a hoarse whisper. "Oh, yes! I know now; you want me to go. I—I am going. Arthur—where is he?" and her eyes wandered vacantly round the room until they rested on that guilty, shrinking figure.

Then she laughed—oh, such a terrible laugh—that those who heard shuddered, and thought, affrightedly, the girl was stricken with madness.

"Arthur—I have called you husband—I have loved you well and truly—and—you—have—given me shame—as my reward." (How slowly and painfully her words came.) "You are—sending me—out into a cruel world—bereft of name and honour!—Heaven help me! I see you—now as you are—and not for worlds—would I live with you—again, or call you husband!"

She staggered blindly towards the door, but Arthur intercepted her.

"I have wronged you," he said in a strange, hardly intelligible voice, "but I will not see you want. Say good-bye to me, Mary? Oh, Heaven!" and then he dropped into a chair, and covering his face with his hands, broke into a hoarse and terrible sob.

She looked on him a moment, with loathing and pity struggling for supremacy in her breast, her eyes; then, without a word, turned from him, and some one in mercy opened the door.

A little later they heard the hall-door slam, and knew that she had gone out into the bitter night, homeless, friendless, in all probability penniless.

Arthur started to his feet, his face pallid as death, his eyes bloodshot, and rushing out called her name softly at first, then louder, louder still, but there came no answer to his cries; and sinking back to the house like a beaten cur, he fell prone upon the steps in a swoon.

This Christmas Eve was as unlike the typical Christmas as it was possible to be. The wind shrieked and howled over the desolate fens, driving all before it; bending and breaking the trees so sparsely scattered over the district; the rain fell in torrents, swelling

every tiny ditch and dyke into quite noble proportions.

It was a wild and eerie scene, a wild and eerie night; and the distant clang of the Christmas bells sounded uncanny in the thick, unwholesome air.

There was, with one exception, no sign of life, and that exception—oh! the shame and pity of it!—was a young and a delicate girl. Mad with her misery, poor Mary made her way to the distant station. Did no thought of that last walk there come to intensify her anguish then? How full of hope she had been! How confident of Arthur's love and faith! And now she was thrown upon the world, her reputation gone, a wife and no wife; for never for a moment did she dream of proving her marriage.

"She loathed from the trodden heart
That thing which she had found man's love to be."

Arriving at the station she counted her little store of money. She had twelve shillings in all.

She longed to put as great a distance between Childesthorpe and herself as possible, but she dared not spend more than five shillings on her ticket, and quite at random pitched upon a very small town rejoicing in the name of Bodkin-sur-Clay.

The portier looked curiously at her. She was so wild and white, and looked so odd, shrouded from head to foot in that dark cloak; but he wished her a "merry Christmas," and she could have shrieked over the irony of it all.

Throughout the journey she scarcely think; brain and heart alike were numb.

"To-morrow," she whispered to herself; "to-morrow I shall realise all."

Arrived at the miserable little station, she inquired the way to the town.

"It's straight ahead, miss, but it's a good three miles off, and there's only one house along the road. It isn't a nice walk at night for a girl."

"I must press on," she said, heavily; and once more she was out in the wind and rain, fighting with the unkind elements—wet to the skin, frightened by her unusual surroundings, but always resolute to place miles between herself and Arthur.

On and on; and oh! how weary she was! She felt it impossible to reach the town, but "perhaps," she thought, "the people at that half-way house would give her shelter for the night." It was in sight now—a black mass against a blacker sky.

Tossed and buffeted to and fro, breathless with her exertions, faint with grief and fasting, she held on her way, each step growing feebler than the last, whilst a deathlike faintness stole over brain and body alike.

"I never shall do it!" she gasped, and a great sob rose to her lips. "There are no lights visible, and if the house is empty I can go no farther. I must lie down and die."

But she was young, and life is sweet; although to her as yet only the seamy side had been shown. So she fought on with failing strength, with her sweet eyes all but blinded by the rain and her own moist bitter tears.

The house towards which she bent her steps stood all alone on the edge of the wood—a gaunt, ancient building, which offered no attraction to any passer-by. The windows were all shuttered and barred, and a deathly stillness, (added to the general gloom), made it appear uncanny, yet the poor wanderer regarded it as a veritable haven of rest!

In one of the many large rooms, bending over a huge fire—the only cheerful thing there—sat a man, looking with sombre, brooding eyes into the glowing embers.

"Pain and shame, and bitterness of spirit, year in and year out," he muttered. "Oh, Heaven! when will it all end?"

The firelight flickered over his face, and showed it worn and old beyond his years; for despite the whitening hair and sunken (though

still bright) eyes he could not have been much more than forty.

"I am weary of it all," he said, again breaking the heavy silence, "weary of this unrest and desolation, the dreadful memories of a bitter past," and he groaned as his head sank lower, lower yet, until his chin rested on his breast.

It was then that a faint knock was heard at the front door, scarcely discernible amid the howling wind and driving rain.

He started erect. Visitors were very rare at Long Croft, and certainly he expected none, being so long dead to the world.

"I must have been mistaken," he said; but even as he spoke he heard that faint tapping again, and then an old woman entered hurriedly, looking very scared and white.

"Oh, sir, they've come at last, as I said they would! You ain't no right to live in such a lone house; with none but me to see after you. For meay's sake, don't open the door. We shall be killed where we stand. Oh, no, sir! Oh, no, Mr. Cassilis!" as he caught up a lamp, "for pity's sake don't go for to put yourself and me in such danger."

"Stand back, Hannah!" he said, sternly, and putting her aside strode into the gloomy hall; and even whilst he busied himself with bolts and bars he heard a sweet voice outside, praying him, for Heaven's sake, to give a wretched woman shelter. Then it died out in a low wall; and when at last the door was opened, he saw a woman's figure prone upon the steps, her arms outstretched, her face hidden in the waves of long, dark hair. He started back with a hoarse cry, "Oh, Heaven! not you," he said. "Have you come back to torture me after all these years?"

The horror and loathing on his face, the love which struggled with the scorn in his eyes, made him terrible to see.

Stooping, he turned the woman's face towards him, and a sigh of relief rose to his lips as the lamp-light flickered across the pale, small features, and proud, swarthy mouth.

"Heaven be thanked!" he said. Then calling to Hannah he lifted the girl in his strong, sinewy arms, and prepared to carry her in.

"Who is she? Are you sure she is alone?" questioned the woman.

"Stand out of my way, and let me get her comfortably settled on the couch. Now, some brandy; she is wet through!"

Hannah obeyed in silence, a little awed by her master's manner; but she noticed that although the stranger's clothes were inexpensive they were neatly ordered, and that she had the look of a lady.

Mr. Cassilis seemed to notice nothing, only continued his kindly offices with a gentleness one could scarcely believe in him, and at last he was rewarded by seeing the heavy, white lids lift, the grey eyes open upon his face, in perplexed and troubled scrutiny.

"Drink this," he said, holding a glass of hot brandy-and-water to the pale lips, and he would take no denial; only stood watching her with frowning brow, and critical, sombre eyes.

"What is your name?" he asked, as he relieved her of the glass.

"Mary Verral."

"Where do you come from? What are your friends about to allow you to roam over the country in this fashion?"

"I have no friends, and I am seeking employment."

He regarded her intently, then said,—

"You are too fatigued to go further tonight. Hannah, take Miss Verral to your room, and see that her clothes are dried. Tomorrow you shall tell me your story; to-night you had better rest."

"Do you mean I may stay here to night? Oh! how shall I thank you! Tell me your name that I may remember it in my prayers," and the beautiful grey eyes were full of grateful tears; the sweet pale face was flushed and agitated.

"I am Philip Cassilis, and I want no

thanks. Let Hannah bring you some supper."

"I could not eat, thank you."

"Very well, then I insist you shall go to bed at once. Good-night."

He stood watching her whilst she went upstairs with weary, lagging steps, then, returning to his desolate fireside, stretched out his arms with heavy groan.

"It is the same all the world over," he said.

"Want, misery, and sin rule us with a high hand. Even that child has not escaped misfortune."

When Mary woke the next morning, (for despite her misery she had been so weary as to fall asleep as soon as her head touched the pillows), she heard the distant chiming of the town bells, and for a moment wondered where she was. Then, as recollection came to her, fraught with bitter anguish and shame, she cowered down amongst her pillows, praying Heaven in its mercy to take her home.

But she was not allowed much time for reflection.

Presently Hannah entered with a small tray of good things; but although Mary drank eagerly of the coffee, she utterly refused to eat anything.

"My throat is so sore," she said, "and my limbs ache as though I had been beaten; but perhaps I shall feel better when I am up and dressed."

"Very likely. You've took cold, of course, and there ain't no wonder, neither. I've dried and brushed your clothes, and made 'em as decent as I can, but they're just about spoiled. Can you find your way downstairs, 'cause when you are dressed the master wants to see you."

"Oh, yes, thank you!" and weakly, painfully, the poor girl began her toilet.

When she went downstairs she found Mr. Cassilis waiting her. Bowing formally, he drew a chair towards the fire and made her sit down.

"You look ill," he said, in an abrupt but not unkindly way. "If you feel the task too hard to tell me your story wait until to-morrow."

"Oh! no, no; I cannot trespass so greatly upon your kindness."

"No creature was ever turned from my doors on Christmas Day," coldly; "and I am old enough to be your father. You need not fear that your stay in my house will be misconstrued. They call me here" with a bitter smile, "'Simon,' 'Diogenes,' 'Miser,' and a host of other flattering names; but much as I hate the world, cruelly as it has treated me, I am not yet quite without a heart or bowels of compassion."

"Oh! I feel that; and I feel, too, that this harsh manner, (forgive me), is worn as a disguise, and I will tell you all from beginning to end;" and then she began her sad and bitter story, Mr. Cassilis listening with darkening face and flashing eyes; and when she had made an end to the sorry narrative, he said,—

"Poor child! poor child! I would not insult you by begging you to swear your tale is true, but I will stand by you and see you righted."

But she broke out—

"You will not send me back to him! He is my husband, but he has forfeited all claim to my love and duty. I would die rather than go back to him."

"You shall not go back, but you shall be righted. Child, I, too, have suffered; ay, as bitterly, even if not more so than you. You shall stay with me until you have recruited your strength and found employment; and should that villain attempt to molest you I swear he shall rue it until the day of his death."

She caught his hand and kissed it, and as she did so the Christmas bells rang out wildly, joyously. A bitter sneer disfigured the man's face, a wild look leapt into his eyes.

"Listen to them," he said, quickly, "they are heralds of joy to others. We should do well, you and I—you so young and fair, I so old and worn—to curse our fate and die."

The girl started to her feet, such a host of terrible memories thronged her brain, such mad anguish possessed her heart, remembering that bygone Christmas only a year ago—one little year ago! Oh! love, hope, joy of other days—where were they now? Withered and dead, even as the flowers of last summer, and in the ways she used to walk with Arthur she might never be seen again.

False to love, false to honour, and every manly instinct, how low had her idol fallen! She could remember him now only with utmost loathing and contempt. Her life was over and done with.

Oh, Heaven! grant that death would come to ease her terrible burden.

With a low, wild cry she caught at her throat, as though she were suffocating.

"A happy Christmas!" she cried, laughing shrilly. "A happy Christmas to you all!" and fell prone to the ground. Before night she was in a raging fever.

(To be continued.)

FACETIA.

BLAZE: "Yew, I suffer from enes, don'tcher know. Caun't you pesswibe aw remedy?"

Doctor: "Try work."

"JOHNTY," said the professor to the young graduate, "can you name me the greatest composer of our time?" "Chloroform" is about as good as any," was the reply.

"WHAT are you doing now, GIN?" said one young man about town to another. "Oh, I write for a living." "On the daily press?" "No; I write to father about twice a month for a remittance."

PROSPECTIVE FATHER-IN-LAW: "How do you expect to get along without a salary if you are going to get married?" Young Smiley Basher: "That is not the point: how am I to get along if I don't get married?"

COMPLAINANT: "He applied an appropriate epithet to me." Judge: "What was it?" "He called me a lying scoundrel." Well, you mean opprobrious; but still I won't contradict you. It may have been appropriate."

MRS. GADD: "I'm nearly tired to death; was at Mrs. Nabb's party last night." Mrs. Jones: "I didn't go; in fact did not get an invitation. Were there many there?" Mrs. Gadd: "Oh, no: it was very select."

WIFE: "Just think; I have sat here and seen man going after man into that saloon over there." Husband: "You're right. That's just what they're doing. Every man who enters there will tell you that he is going in after another man."

MRS. BLINKS: "See here, Mr. B., I thought you said you had been duck shooting." Mr. Blinks: "Yes, m' dear, been duck (ho), shooting." "But these ducks you brought home are tame ducks." "Y-e-s, m' dear, I tamed 'em after I (ho) shot 'em."

TONGUE OLD WATCH.—Mrs. Oldboy: "Oh, you needn't talk, John. You was bound to have me. You can't say that I ever ran after you." Oldboy: "Very true, Maria, and the rat-trap never runs after the mouse, but it gathers him in all the same."

IN THE THEOLOGICAL CLASS.—Professor: "Can any of you tell me to what class young Reverend Hawke belongs?" Facetious Student: "I can, professor." Professor: "What class, Mr. B?" Facetious Student: "Why, to the birds of prey, I suppose."

TEACHER: "What rewards were given to the victor in the ancient games, Sammy?" Sammy: "A little boy was set up on his head." Teacher: "A little boy? Where did you get that notion?" Sammy: "Why, you told us, yesterday, that a chaplet was put on his head; and if a ducklet is a little duck, and a booklet a little book, ain't a chaplet a little chap—say?"

SOCIETY.

An idea, which, it is to be hoped, may not be generally adopted, is a linen shirt-button with a diamond in the middle; there is a mock modesty about this notion which is more ludicrous than pleasing.

A NEW finish for the neck of winter garments is called the shawl collar. It is deep at the back and turns over like a raver, extending to the waist at one side only. These are made of velvet or fur, and are adjustable.

SOME of the newest names given to waltzes will afford suggestive matter for pleasant or serious chat during the interval for breathing; such, for instance, as "It is time to propose," "The Single Tax," &c.

REAL dead butterflies are now used for the adornment of bonnets and those within. The caterpillars of Brazil are employed for the hair; they are like beautiful enamels.

A musical kettle has been invented by an Englishman in Birmingham. The device consists in fitting a reed into the lid, so that the steam, when the "kettle boils," should cause the reed to sound.

PRINCE EDWARD is proving really popular in India. The imperturbable gravity which is apt to be misconstrued by a nation accustomed to the gayish urbanity of the Hair-Apparatus, is accepted by the natives as a truly royal trait. The Heir-Presumptive is to them an ideal Prince after their own heart, and a distinct "success."

THE Queen is a great success as a farmer, not only because of the excellance of the animals bred upon her various farms, but also because a loyal public eagerly risks dyspepsia by purchasing joints from obese beasts "bred and fed by Her Majesty," and butchers, knowing this, bid extravagant prices for the royal beavers, sheep, and swine.

The first lady who made yellow a fashionable colour for this winter's wear was Queen Margherita of Italy at one of her receptions in autumn, in the park at Monza. Her Majesty's dress was profusely trimmed with yellow, and she wore a lovely bonnet with feathers and aigrettes of the same colour. On another occasion she wore a yellow dress, which became her wonderfully, and Her Majesty is blonde!

An original "good luck" bangle has just made its appearance in the Paris shop windows. The bracelet is a stem of bamboo in gold coiled round to fit the wrist, from which depends a tiny enamelled figure of a Javanese dancer. Upon the bangle are inscribed the words: "Your every wish shall be granted," "Illness shall spare you." Could we but pin faith on such a prophecy—all Javanese thought it be—every man, woman and child would soon be possessor of the novel little trinket.

A BRIGIT, studious young woman, still in her early twenties, found herself the victim of a scowl which had caused two little perpendicular lines to plough in between her eyes and deface her white brow. This hideous habit she found it almost impossible to correct, and she frowned even in her sleep. At length she set herself to cure the habit by placing the mirror before her face when she read, wrote, or studied; but as this distractred her attention from her work she finally placed a ribbon band tightly across her brow, tying it in a knot at the back of her head, and at night she slept with it on. After several months the little hair-lines disappeared from her pretty forehead, and she is now quite cured of the disfiguring habit.

THE Duke of Westminster's excellent idea of making a small charge for admission to view Eaton Hall, and devoting the proceeds to charitable objects, deserves to be imitated by all the other fortunate owners of "the stately homes of England." From the shillings paid for the inspection of Eaton Hall during the past year the Duke has been able to forward £500 to the Chester Infirmary, and £200 to the Grosvenor Museum and School of Art.

STATISTICS.

THERE is only one Church missionary for every 16,876 Jews.

THE Museum of Natural History at Paris has a colossal block of salt. It weighs 29,000 pounds.

THE total weight of letters and postcards despatched by sea from the United States last year was 683,131 lbs., and the total of other mail matter was 3,428,721 lbs.

THE consumption of milk in the metropolis is said to be forty million gallons yearly, and it is computed that a herd of 84,000 cows is required to supply the whole of London throughout the year.

A BIG tree in Gippland, about forty miles from Sale, Australia, is reported. Three feet from the ground it measures 121 feet 6 inches in circumference. About 70 feet from the ground it branches into two, presenting a very imposing appearance.

GEMS.

No battle is lost till it is won; and self-control—the victory of reason over impulse—is a battle that is never lost, but is always being won by those who wish to try.

SO completely does the success of a man's work depend upon the success of his life that it is worse than useless for him to attempt to secure the former at the expense of the latter.

There is a point in generosity beyond which a man's duty to himself, to his family, and to society at large forbid him to go. There stop. Let no flattery, no representations, however plausible, induce you to take one step beyond it. Lay down common-sense rules for your guidance, and let them be absolute laws.

THE great source of calamity lies in regret or anticipation; he, therefore, is most wise who thinks of the present alone, regardless of the past or future. This is impossible to a man of pleasure, it is difficult to a man of business, and is in some degree attainable by the philosopher. Happy were we all born philosophers, all born with a talent of thus dissipating our own cares by spreading them upon all mankind.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TONGUE ON TOAST.—Chop calf's tongue fine; beat the yolks of two eggs, stir them in with the meat, season with pepper, salt, and a little prepared mustard; put a cup of milk into a saucepan, and add the mixture, and stir over the fire until the eggs are cooked. Serve immediately on slices of buttered toast.

LEMONADE.—1. Put 2 lbs. of white sugar into two quarts of water that has been boiled, add to this the juice of eight lemons; when the sugar has melted, strain through a napkin, and serve. 2. Squeeze the juice from five fresh lemons into one-pint of clear syrup, pare off the thin rind and steep it in boiling water; when cold, add the water to the syrup with fresh filtered water to taste.

SMOTHERED CHICKEN (AMERICAN).—Prepare your chicken as for broiling, cutting it down the back. If you choose you may halve it, and also remove the breast bone, which is very easily done. Salt and butter it well, bat no water, and lay it in a tin or iron pan with a close-fitting cover, which you may be obliged to have made to order; put it in a good oven, so that it will cook quickly; it ought to be quite done and nicely browned in from thirty-five to forty minutes. Lay the chicken on the platter, dredge a little flour into the melted butter, stir it, and when brown, pour in enough boiling water to make a nice gravy, which pour over the chicken.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE testing of the Forth Bridge will necessitate the employment of fifty engines.

A JAPANESE ordinance provides that every time a doctor loses a patient by death he shall hang a red lantern over his door for a fixed period.

We have it on equally good authority that the eggs of an owl, broken, and put into the cups of a drunkard, will so influence him that he will suddenly "lothe his good liquour," and be displeased with drinking.

PAPER doors are said to be great improvements over wooden ones. They are formed of two thick paper boards, stamped and moulded into panels, and glazed together with glue and potash, and then rolled through heavy rollers.

We are assured that at Woking the actual cremation of a body costs only 7s., while the total expenses, including the charge for the use of the crematorium, the fees of the attendants, and all other items connected with the ceremony, are fixed at £6.

RABIES never break out in any country unless when introduced there by an animal bitten in another place where the disease is endemic. Many islands in the Pacific Ocean are quite free from it. It is not met with in the wide Australian continent, Norway or Lapland.

A CHINESE citizen, who has just visited our country, has returned home and given his impressions to his fellows. Speaking of our criminals, he says:—"With each prisoner the only fear is lest he should be uncomfortable, or should fall ill; and so in all matters of clothing, food, and surrounding, he is far better off than he was at home."

A SIMPLE stove for warming rooms by means of solar heat has been contrived, according to an American contemporary. It consists of a shallow box, having a bottom of corrugated iron and a glass top. This device is placed outside the building where the sun can shine directly into it. The rays pass through the glass and are absorbed by the metal, heating it to a high temperature and warming the air of the box. The air, which on sunny days rises to 90 degs. Fah., is conveyed into the room to be heated.

AN ivy billiard ball is an excellent barometer. It always rolls slow and with difficulty over the cloth when it is going to rain. Ivory is so sensitive to changes of the temperature, particularly from dry to moist, that the effect is felt almost instantaneously. The cue will get cranky, too, when there is going to be a change, long before the dampness is perceptible in any other way. Another peculiarity of the ivory globes is their tendency to become egg shaped. They contract at what are called the top and bottom poles and swell out at the sides. They are very susceptible to draughts, which crack the ivory and cause it to chip off. Study the behaviour of a billiard-ball, and you can rival the clerk of the weather him-self.

THE "printer's devil" is the name given to the lad who runs errands for the press-room, and has to do odd jobs. How he came to receive this sobriquet is not quite certain. Perhaps it finds its origin in the fact that at one time printing was called the "Black Art," and the youths who assisted were known as imps. There is a legend, however, that a printer of Venice, Aldus Manutius by name, had to help him a little negro boy, who had been left behind by a trading vessel. A report was spread that Manutius was assisted by a black imp. To dispel this rumour he showed the boy to the people and said, "Be it known in Venice that I, Aldus Manutius, printer to the Holy Church and the doge, have this day made a public exposure of the 'printer's devil.' All who think he is not flesh and blood may come and pinch him." This satisfied the people, and the boy was left alone by them.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

BERTHA.—Sybil is pronounced as if written "Sibble."

H.—The principal seat of the Duke of Portland is Welbeck Abbey.

DICK.—Liverpool is the largest and Wells the smallest city in England.

X.—The drum was used by the Egyptians, and brought by the Moors into Spain.

J. BIRD.—The husband is always entitled to the custody of the children of the marriage.

TENANT.—A landlord can seize under a distraint goods that have been purchased under the hire system.

LONDON BOY.—Lincoln's Inn Fields is a square in London, laid out by Inigo Jones, and built in 1619-36.

A LOVER.—It would be highly improper. Wait till you are engaged, and then give her an engagement-ring.

D. L.—A master cannot be compelled to compensate his servants for the loss of their goods in a fire at his house.

LADY ANN.—The play of "Wild Oats" was written by John O'Keefe, a native of Dublin. He died in England in 1833.

DORIS.—Mince meat and mince pies improve by keeping. Make the mince two or three weeks before use, and the pies several days.

H. H.—Mrs. Emma C. Willard was the author of the poem "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep." Her name before marriage was Hart.

J. C.—Coughs may be much alleviated and dry throats cured by glycerine and lemon-juice taken at night. The glycerine should be diluted.

HARIBET.—A domestic servant is entitled by custom to give a month's notice at any time, and not only on a day on which wages are due.

JANE.—A piece of dry bread, tied in a bag and placed in the water while cabbage is boiling, will prevent the unpleasant odour which usually arises.

TRROUBLED BOB.—Wart pencils are composed of lunar caustic, or some other powerful acid. The warts should disappear in a short time after application.

ELIFIE.—No one can ask honestly or hopefully to be delivered from temptation unless he has himself honestly and firmly determined to do the best he can to keep out of it.

ALICE.—Your future husband will not need to take out a license for his pony and trap if it is to be used for business purposes. It must have his name on it in legible letters.

C. D.—Practical application is the only mordant which will set things in the memory. Study, without it, gymnastics, and not work, which alone will get intellectual bread.

SUPPER.—For a cough, boil one ounce of flaxseed in a pint of water, strain and add a little honey, one ounce of rock candy, and the juice of three lemons; mix and boil well. Drink as hot as possible.

ROB.—A white man who is born and bred in New England, and whose parents were citizens of the United States at his birth, is called a Yankee, although his parents may have been of foreign origin.

M. M. M.—The daily papers will doubtless keep the public advised upon the subject. We know of no particular progress made during the present year, nor of any official proceedings relative to the study.

NOVEL READER.—You are right. James Fenimore Cooper, the celebrated American novelist, was born in Burlington, New Jersey, September 15, 1789. He died at Cooperstown, New York, September 14, 1851.

HOUSEKEEPER.—Freezing does not materially injure either ripe apples or onions, if they can be kept frozen and then thawed out gradually. It is the alternate thawing and freezing that starts them to decaying.

GLENBROO'.—On which side of a lady on horseback her escort should ride is, we believe, yet a disputed point; though gentlemen, riding, or walking, or sitting, try to get on the right side of every woman they know.

BETA.—To clean gold or silver embroidery, warm some spirits of wine, and apply it with a clean sponge. Then dry it, by rubbing it with soft, new canton damask. Gold and silver lace may be cleaned thus. Also jewellery.

PETRONELLA.—We do not believe in any of the cosmetics advertised. A young lady should become accomplished, and exhibit such excellence of character, that nobody would think of freckles while in her presence.

ONLY A BOY.—Leander's Tower is an ancient structure near the Golden Horn at Constantinople, so-called after the Leander of Abydos, who swam nightly across the Hellespont to visit Hero. It is now used as a light-house.

MARY.—We never, under any circumstances, answer our correspondents through the post. It is against the rules of the paper. We have no list of asylums. Your best plan will be to consult the directory, you will find us there.

A READER.—The cothurn, from the Latin *cothurnus*, buckin, was a high-laced boot worn by the ancients. It rose nearly to the knee, and was laced in front, and highly ornamented. The soles were made very thick for the use of actors who wished to add to their height. It is pronounced with the accent on the first syllable.

MECHANIC.—You need not despair; the stains can be removed—only care will be needed in the process. A small quantity of oil of vitriol in the water you wash your hands in—using no soap—will remove any stains from the skin.

EMMIE.—Put all such nonsense out of your head at present, and do not try to attract the attention of the men. A modest, retiring girl who does not put herself forward is far more likely to get a husband than anyone else.

SAILOR.—Chili, a republic of South America, has almost every variety of climate. One-quarter of the country is near the level of the sea, while the great Andes range of mountains rise far above the line of perpetual snow.

EX-EW.—Egeria, one of the nymphs of Roman mythology, is represented on ancient sculptures in a costume similar to that of the Muses, with floating robe, naked feet, dishevelled hair, and in the attitude of writing a volume which she holds upon her knees.

A. H.—There is no rule. Say whatever seems most appropriate at the time. If the gentleman asking you to dance is a stranger, a courteous word or two of assent is sufficient; the same with a refusal. Be perfectly natural, and say just what is polite and pleasant.

N. N. N.—The headdresses of the ladies in 1776 were remarkable for their enormous height. Fashion ruled its votaries then as arbitrarily as in our day. The coiffure of a belle of fashion was described as "a mountain of wool, hair, powder, lawn, muslin, net, lace, gauze, ribbon, flowers, feathers, and wire."

SWETT SIXTEEN.

I KNOW, fair girl, thy heart is bright,
And joy hath there unnumbered springs,

That soon will give to life and light

The blissful sweets love's coming brings;

For now no threatening clouds are seen

In thy young summer's glowing sky,

And no dark shapes appear between

Thine own and Hope's inspiring eye,

While peace reigns in that heart of thine,

And heav'n's pure beams about thy shine!

They songs have now a single theme—
Of childhood's well-remembered day,
Of scenes and hours that never seem
To lose their charm, or fade away;
But, ripening toward womanhood,
Upon thy heart will come a change
So marvelous, not understood,
Yet fraught with pleasure rare and strange,
But Love will bring this change to thee,
And all thy songs of love will be!

Then through thy life thy heart will sing,
No doubtful strains born of thy dreams;
But precious love, unaltering,
That chief of joys, and best of themes!
For love's no fancy of the eye;
Its birth and home is in the heart
Of gentleness and purity,
And free from all of guile and art.
Such is, fair girl, that heart of thine—
For love a home—for love a shrine!

D. W.

S. H.—The photograph of the unfortunate Prince Rudolph adorns the entrance to the dining-room of one of the famous restaurants of Vienna. It is beautifully framed, and around it are the bills of fare of the various dishes partaken of by the Prince in this establishment.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—We cannot undertake to answer any communications under a fortnight at least after receiving the letters; it is often three weeks before the replies appear. You will have doubtless seen the answer to your letter before this; all are replied to in due course.

PUZZLER JEM.—Under the circumstances which you describe, you ought to be invited to act as groomsmen at the wedding of your future sister-in-law. Otherwise, your fiancée's brother should stand up with her, and leave the stranger groomsmen to act as partner of the younger sister.

SCOTCH LASSIE.—Everything that can be tartan is made so, and bonnets, photo-frames, jackets, and shoes are designated "The Fife" or "The Duchess of Fife." The latest developments of the plaid crass are tartan stockings, tartan silk waistbands, and narrow, flat strips of check silk for tacking in the collars and cuffs of dresses.

BRIDE'S FRIEND.—The plain white linen teacloths would be both useful and suitable as gifts to your friend, and you cannot do better than fill in the corners with a large monogram worked in white, and, of course, the hemstitch border would be a vast improvement. In fact, an almost absolute necessity, unless you have a worked border of some kind.

GIRL OF THE PERIOD.—Brothers and sisters are all the better for sharing one another's studies and games up to a certain point. The girl who can handle a tennis racket and a croquet mallet vindicates her right to consideration. The boys will never speak of her as "only a girl," and she will be all the franker and none the less sweet for a healthy mixture of work and play. Good comradeship between brothers and sisters is a thing much to be desired; it saves the girls from prudery and the boys from boorishness, sweetens the natures of both, and acts by restraining everyone from doing or saying what would be shameful in the eyes of the "other side."

FRED'S DARLING.—1. Frederick, from the German, means rich peace; Frank, German, free; William, German, deserving many; Robert, German, famous in counsel; David, Hebrew, well-loved. 2. Unless you select a name for your child that is absolutely improper, the clergyman has nothing to do with it; he cannot refuse to call it whatever you choose to select.

ETRA.—Oil spots in marble, if not too old, are easily removed by repeatedly covering them with a thin paste of calcined magnesia and benzine; the magnesia is brushed away after the benzine has evaporated. Another recipe says that slaked lime is mixed with a strong soap solution of a cream thickness; this is placed upon the spot and rubbed off again until the oil spot has disappeared.

BLISTER ROSE.—It is always better to wear your hair in a style which thoroughly suits your face, than to be too particular in following the fashion. It does not become everyone to draw it up to the top of the head. Sidecurls are quite things of the past, though there is no doubt that they will be fashionable again some day. All our grandmother's styles of dressing are coming to the front now. We, may come to the piled-up head-dresses of the last century, as time goes on.

A BER.—The highest structure of masonry in the world is said to be the National Museum recently completed in Turin. It was originally designed for a synagogue, but it proved ill-adapted for that purpose, and was sold to the city. It was then converted into a museum as a monument to the memory of Victor Emmanuel. On top of the dome rises a spire nearly as high as the whole of the rest of the building. The gilt statue on the top of the spire stands 538 feet from the ground.

DOUBTING ROSE.—There is no reason why a marriage with a man younger than yourself should be unhappy, though it is always better that the difference should be on the other side. In your case, we are of opinion that your sister is quite right; a lad of eighteen can hardly know his own mind about such an important subject as matrimony. We should advise you to wait for five years at least before you marry him; even then he will be young to take upon himself the responsibilities of a household.

PROFIT AND LOSS.—You can only shut the hens up until they learn to behave themselves. Fasten up the nests at night so that they cannot get into them, and so force them to sleep on the perches. In the daytime, if you can shut them up somewhere, where it is impossible for them to sit, and where they can see food and water without being able to get it, they will soon be cured. If you have not a separate run to put them in, turn an old basket or tub over them, and keep them under it till they are cured.

WANTS TO KNOW.—You seem to have the impression that the name London is applied to an aggregation of distinct cities, contiguous in situation, only one of which should properly be known as London. Such is not the case. Although London is divided into numerous distinct geographical districts, it is one municipality and is under the government of one lord mayor. In 1881 it had a population of 3,816,483. In 1887 its population was estimated at 4,315,000. Its present population is estimated at 4,850,000.

LOVELY BEATRICE.—1. Girls of fourteen should have nothing to do with young men, we can only suppose you have no parents or friends to look after you, or you would have scarcely written such a letter. 2. You will get all information about the telegraph work at the nearest district post-office. Your writing should be good enough for it. 3. The letter is properly spelt and expressed. 4. A little violet powder will take away the greenish appearance you complain of, but you must be careful to wipe it off, after applying it, or it will give you a patchy appearance. 5. Perhaps you require a little medicine; your friends should look after your health.

EX-SOLDIER.—The oriflamme was the banner of the Capetian Kings of France. It was originally that of the Abbey of St. Denis, being used in religious ceremonies. It was carried also by the Counts of Vexin, in their capacity of the patrons of the monastery in the wars which they waged for its protection. After the annexation of Vexin to the dominions of Philip I. of France, the oriflamme was carried by himself and his successors. Louis VI. raised it for the first time in 1124. It was not used after the defeat of Agincourt in 1415. It was of red or flame-coloured silk, with two notches at its end, adorned with green silk tassels, and hanging from a gilded shaft. The Capetian Kings were the third race of French kings, beginning with Hugh Capet (987). They were fifteen in number, and reigned from 987 to 1328.

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